

## THE POMPADOUR

By the same Author

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A COURTESAN OF PARADISE  
Louise, duchesse de La Vallière, or  
Sister Louise of the Order of Mount Carmel



MADAME DE POMPADOUR  
From a painting attributed to Van Loo  
*Photograph : Bulloz*

A decorative border with floral and vine motifs in each corner, enclosing the text.

# THE POMPADOUR

by

MARGARET  
TOUNCER

FABER AND FABER  
24 Russell Square  
London



*First published in April Mcmxxxvii  
by Faber and Faber Limited  
24 Russell Square London W.C. 1  
Printed in Great Britain by  
R. MacLehose and Company Limited  
The University Press Glasgow  
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To  
TOM TROUNCER

‘After a long conversation with the marquise de Pompadour, in February 1764, a few weeks before her death, Madame de la Ferté-Imbault, who was the daughter of Madame Geoffrin, wrote: “I have never listened to a sermon better calculated to prove the sorrows which are linked with ambition; I saw her in turn so wretched, so insolent, so violently agitated and so entangled in her supreme power, that I left her house after an hour of this conversation with my imagination haunted by the thought that the only refuge remaining to her was Death.”’ Archives de Monsieur le Marquis d’Estampes.

‘Study history seriously. You think you are going to be scandalised, you find you will benefit morally. Corrupt eras are perhaps more fertile in noble lessons than austere ones. It is not virtue, it is vice which cries out to us: “Vanity, all is vanity.”’ La Cour de Louis XV. IMBERT DE ST. AMAND.

## PREFACE

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If we are to see personalities in their right perspective, they must be placed, not only against the background of their centuries, but in their relation to eternity. I therefore planned a trilogy: my first book<sup>1</sup> was about a woman in Louis XIV's reign who sinned and repented, this my second is about a woman in Louis XV's reign who sinned and did not repent, and my third will be about a woman in Louis XVI's reign who led a blameless life—it will probably not run into more than one edition.

In the present study, I have been compelled by considerations of space to omit chapters on the marquise de Pompadour's share in the parliamentary quarrels of the reign and the suppression of the Jesuits. Though the latter is a thorny subject and reveals her in the grimace of false piety, its omission does not, I think, distort the traditional likeness handed down to history—that of a woman disappointed in love who sought consolation in the more enduring pleasures of art and literary patronage.

Original sources for a study of the marquise and her time are multitudinous, but lovers of the *dix-huitième* should be warned against the personal prejudice and spite which have coloured historical judgment. Louis XV particularly has suffered from the agitators of the Revolution, who used the ordures written by Soulavie and the Prussian pamphleteers to excite mob-hatred against the Monarchy. The characters and

<sup>1</sup> *A Courtesan of Paradise*, about Louise, duchesse de La Vallière.

## PREFACE

professions of the witnesses must be taken into account. The exiled d'Argenson is often a liar through malice, Barbier, not of the Court, repeats Paris gossip at second hand, Madame du Hausset, the marquise de Pompadour's confidential lady's maid, whose memoirs were only saved from the flames in the nick of time, has the limitations of her class and horizon, the duc de Luynes and the duc de Croÿ are both witnesses of impeccable veracity, but their guilelessness often spells a diverting lack of shrewdness, Voltaire is warped by disappointed ambition; of them all, the abbé de Bernis, Pompadour's very faithful friend, is perhaps the most sensitively perceptive, accurate and reliable. Of more modern biographers, no praise could be too high for Monsieur Pierre de Nolhac. One must be careful with the de Goncourts—their chronology is sometimes shaky and their style misleading, their eyes are dimmed by intense dislike. Nevertheless, they make fine reading from a more literary point of view.

For myself, I confess that I pity the marquise de Pompadour more than I dislike her. And then she lived in an entrancing century. Those of us in London who cannot visit Paris and Versailles are fortunate in possessing wonderful opportunities for studying that century by looking at the pictures and furniture of the Jones bequest in the Victoria and Albert Museum. At the Wallace Collection, not only can we see portraits of the marquise herself but the famous pictures Boucher painted for her—'Le Lever du Soleil' and 'Le Coucher du Soleil'.

But to capture a glimpse of her lovely ghost, one must browse at Versailles for a few autumn afternoons. At the bend of some stately alley of yews, where the melancholy rain drips from mouldering urn and stone faun and goddess, she may appear to us, and, pausing before she return to other illustrious shades, look on the château a little wearily with her great sad eyes, and smile her disenchanted smile.

## PREFACE

My warmest thanks to my friend Gilbert Barker, whose advice and generous loan of books from his own collection has deepened my love for a century whose spell will now haunt me for ever.

MARGARET TROUNCER

*7th December, 1936*

## CONTENTS

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Preface	page 9
Prologue	19

### *Part I—Background and Preparation*

I. Monsieur Poisson Narrowly Escapes the Gallows	25
II. The Passing of the Roi Soleil	33
III. The Childhood of the King	44
IV. Mademoiselle Antoinette Poisson at her Convent	54
V. Mademoiselle Antoinette Poisson, Débutante	63
VI. The King takes a Bride and Finds a Family	74
VII. First Infidelities	87
VIII. Toinette marries and Climbs the Social Ladder	102
IX. Madame d'Étioles becomes a Mother and Meets the King	115
X. The Dreadful Events of Metz	126

### *Part II—Realization*

XI. Toinette is Presented at Court. 1745	141
XII. The Marquise feels her Way	157
XIII. Amateur Theatricals and the Suppression of Enemies	173
XIV. Bellevue, or the Lover's Paradise	180
XV. Smoky Chimneys	186
XVI. Asps and Adders	193
XVII. The Marquise at her Dressing Table Presides over Artists, Philosophers and Authors	204

## CONTENTS

### *Part III—Curfew*

XVIII. The Dial Darkens	<i>page</i> 225
XIX. Temporal Punishment and Family Consolations	244
XX. The Hobbies of a Royal Mistress	257
XXI. Pompadour Dabbles in Politics	268
XXII. Damiens and the Downfall of d'Argenson	288
XXIII. The Tomb	295

### *Appendixes*

A. The Mourners	305
B. A Few Dates of Events mentioned in the Book	308
C. List of Dates for the Life of the Marquise	310
D. Dates of some Celebrities mentioned	313
Index	315



## ILLUSTRATIONS

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Madame de Pompadour, from a painting attributed to Van Loo	<i>frontispiece</i>
Les Promenades du Palais des Thuilleries, from an en- graving by Rigaud	<i>facing page 40</i>
Louis XV as a child, from an engraving in the British Museum by Audran after the painting by Gobert	48
Marie Leczinska, wife of Louis XV, from a painting by A. S. Belle in the Musée du Louvre	74
Louis XV in his coronation robes in 1730, from a painting by Hyacinthe Rigaud in the Musée de Versailles	80
Marie Leczinska and the Dauphin, from a painting by A. S. Belle in the Musée du Louvre	86
Le Bal des Ifs donné dans la Galerie des Glaces du Châ- teau de Versailles le 25 Février, 1745, from a painting by N. Cochin	142
Louis XV in the prime of life, from a pastel study by Maurice Quentin de la Tour in the Musée St. Quentin	146
Madame de Pompadour, from a painting by Boucher in the Victoria and Albert Museum	150
La Modiste, from a painting by Boucher in the Wallace Collection	164
Madame de Pompadour, from a painting by Boucher in the Wallace Collection	182
Madame de Pompadour, from a painting by Maurice Quentin de la Tour in the Louvre	220
La Belle Jardinière, from an engraving in the British Museum by J. L. Anselin after the portrait of	

## ILLUSTRATIONS

Madame de Pompadour by C. Van Loo which used to hang in the château of Bellevue <i>facing page</i>	230
Marie Leczinska, wife of Louis XV, in later life, from a painting by Nattier in the Musée de Versailles	270
Madame de Pompadour, from a pastel study by Mau- rice Quentin de la Tour in the Musée St. Quentin	290
Louis XV, from a pastel by Maurice Quentin de la Tour in the Louvre	300

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# PROLOGUE

## PROLOGUE

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One December midnight of the year 1721 the east wind was whistling across the high hill of Montmartre, on the outskirts of Paris: The dilapidated sails of a windmill whirled round like the arms of a mad beggar in rags. At one moment the gale shrieked with fury and the next it was moaning like a creature in pain. It was a fearful place, with the misshapen boulders of its deserted quarries where a fiend might lurk, its chapel of St. Pierre haunted by the sighs of the early martyrs, its Benedictine abbey where nuns were sleeping like corpses in a mortuary.

'Hail, Balthazar,' said a man's voice. (The night was so dark it was impossible to see who was speaking: what gimlet eyes must any man have to pierce that muffling shroud. . . .)

'Hail, Gaspar,' responded another man's voice. 'I thought you were with the Regent to-night.'

'I found that he and his friends were getting along quite well without me, so I came here to ponder alone,' he replied.

'What was the subject of your meditations?' enquired the other.

'I was wondering what could corrupt the nation more thoroughly than anything else. Men are already nauseated with the orgies of the Palais-Royal. That way is too gross, too crude, for man is an intellectual being and I seduced him in the first place, not by sensual pleasures, but by that thirst for knowledge which prompted him to the disobedience of Eden. Ridicule is not enough: Voltaire is not enough; for all his cleverness, he will prove to be limited and vulnerable; as for the philosophers—they won't be able to see beyond the tips

## PROLOGUE

of their own noses. Ah, I need something infinitely subtle, something in the guise of the fairest beauty to debase and pervert the immortal soul of man.'

'And what do you suggest?' asked the other.

'I think it could be done by a woman, very beautiful and very intelligent, and by the power of money. What will men not do for gold! An old priest in the confessional at Notre-Dame the other day was muttering to himself that in all his years of priesthood, he had never heard a man accuse himself of avarice, because avarice is the one sin that is never repented of. Money gives one such power! That fellow Dante from Florence—you remember?—did right to hurl the avaricious into the lowest pit of our demesne.'

'Yes, yes,' said the other impatiently, 'but what is all this leading to?'

'It comes to this,' said Gaspar. 'This woman must ensnare man's senses in wreathen honeysuckle and roses, to the dying fall of a minuet, to an air by Lulli, with the fragrance of ambergris in a crystal flask, in a flutter of her fan where Cupids play, to a rustle of her great silken panniers; and no one must know how ugly she is . . . within.'

'Could you make such a woman?' asked the other with a mirthless laugh.

'Come and see,' Gaspar replied. 'She has just been born in a house in Paris, near St. Eustache (you doubtless recollect that a Black Mass was said there to get rid of that simpering Louise de La Vallière).'

The wind blew such a gust that the bells of the abbey clanged together in leaden discord.

'Come away quickly, I can't stay here,' cried Balthazar. 'Those bells have been blessed.'

The dawn leered across the city like a drunken slut. A listener peering at the ground on which the two speakers had

## PROLOGUE

been standing might have perceived marks which faintly resembled the print of a satyr's foot. But who could tell? The high red heel of a courtier's shoe was so narrow in those days that it left an impression like Satan's hoof.

# PART I

## BACKGROUND AND PREPARATION

# CHAPTER I

## MONSIEUR POISSON NARROWLY ESCAPES THE GALLOWES

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*The father of Toinette Poisson, the future marquise de Pompadour, is to be tried for theft. He says good-bye to his babes and flees to Germany. Street scenes—the harlot, night watchman, milk-girl, coffee merchant, market-gardeners, fishwives, dissipated nobles, grisette, brandy hawker, china vendor, flower-girl. Stench. Sucking-pig. Bathing establishments. Politeness of coachmen. Outskirts of Paris. The police invade Monsieur Poisson's house. What they find up the chimney.*

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*'Between us and Heaven, Hell or Nothingness, there is then only life which is the most fragile thing in the world; and Heaven certainly not being for those who doubt whether their soul is immortal, they have nothing left but to await Hell or Nothingness. There is nothing more real than that, nothing more terrible.'* (PASCAL.)

One night at about three o'clock, early in the year 1722, in a narrow passage unlit even by swinging lanterns, Monsieur Poisson, muffled to the eyes, walked quickly and silently along the wall in the direction of the rue de Cléry in the parish of St. Eustache. He stumbled occasionally in the ruts full of stinking ordures and household garbage. Suddenly he stopped, for a little way ahead of him a small dormer window opened and a troll put her head out cautiously and said 'Tchee Tchee' (the traditional signal for that profession).

'Infected sewer!' he muttered, 'that slut will delay me for fully five minutes,' and he crouched into a doorway. In his



## MONSIEUR POISSON ESCAPES THE GALLOWS

fury he called her all the names he could think of—his knowledge bespoke his familiarity with the species—trollop, mopsy, harri-dan, baggage. . . .

Just then a light appeared, borne by the torch-bearer on his nightly circuit; it revealed both the sordidness of the houses and the vermilion rouge on the cheeks of the blowsy jade in her nightcap.

‘Hi, shut that casement,’ said the torch-bearer hoarsely, ‘or I’ll smoke you out like a rat and you’ll end your days at the Salpêtrière with a cropped head.’

‘Stinking elephant, crawling lobster, putrid rattlesnake, minion of Beelzebub,’ muttered the girl. She drew her head in, but only for a moment. Before the unfortunate man could realise what was happening, she had fetched a *vase-de-nuit* and soused him with the contents, thereby quenching both torch and man.

‘Ah! Ah!’ groaned Monsieur Poisson under his doorway, ‘I am undone, I shall be caught by the police if he makes a commotion. As it is, I was held up by those pestilential youths waiting outside the bride’s house to catch her garter. Ah me, I can see myself in the Bastille already. How foolhardy of me to try and say good-bye to my darling little Toinette.’ (It must be explained that Monsieur Poisson, a commissioner of the profiteering firm of Paris-Duverney brothers, who had supplied provisions for Villars’ army, was being pursued by His Majesty’s Government for malversation. He was planning to escape to Germany before dawn in a coach already waiting for him by the banks of the Seine, and was now tearing home to kiss his beloved baby daughter good-bye. The warrant of arrest would be served on him on the morrow and he feared spies.)

When he had got his breath the torch-bearer gave vent to smothered groans of dismay; the window, covered with oiled rags instead of glass, had shut to. Just then the bells of Notre-

## A THIEF'S LAIR

Dame chimed the half hour. They were echoed by a hundred other bells, some deep-toned, others joyful, like the carillon from the Samaritaine's golden campanile. Taking advantage of the man's oblivion to all else but his own misery, Poisson—Fishy as they were to call him—took to his heels, bolted down the lane and turned the corner at the bottom, heedless of the 'Holàs!' of the watchman who now imagined he'd seen a cut-throat. He ran and ran and ran. Dark shadows of men lurking in the alleys drew back at his approach and cadaverous cats, interrupting their inconsequent amours, fled precipitately up the rickety eaves.

At length he reached a better quarter of the town. He slowed down to a walk as he approached a substantial well-proportioned mansion with a high door for coaches. A light was burning in a first-floor window. His wife, fearful of the spying servants who might sell information to the police, had arranged to wait up for him and unbolt the door herself if he threw a stone against the pane. Poisson sweated with anxiety. Every shadow in the darkness assumed the shape of a police officer and the minutes of waiting seemed like years.

At last he heard a light patter of footsteps, a turning of keys, and the heavy door groaned on its hinges and opened a little.

'Is that you, Monsieur?' said a voice with a rather common twang.

'Yes, Madame, for God's sake open!' And he slipped in.

Madame Poisson, an extremely good-looking, white-skinned brunette with a pair of very intelligent eyes and rather sensuous red lips, was arrayed in a flowered boudoir gown surcharged with a medley of blue *moiré* ribbons.

They tiptoed noiselessly by the room of the door-keeper—a surly fellow who had eyed them suspiciously of late—and went up a wide marble staircase with a beautiful balustrade of wrought iron. At length they reached the bedroom; by the

## MONSIEUR POISSON ESCAPES THE GALLOWS

side of the bed with its immense looped and crimson draperies there were two cots, one containing a little two-year-old boy, Abel, fast asleep, and the other Mademoiselle Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, a few months old and still in her lace-trimmed bib and swaddling bands.

Poisson looked down at the little rosebud in its nest of blue silken cushions and its clouds and cascades of Valenciennes lace, and heaved a sob.

'Sh!' said Madame. 'You will wake her and she will bring the roof down with her cries.'

He peered down again, not daring to touch the tiny clenched fist, the rolls of plump neck, the solemn chin and mouth, the strands of silken hair straying from the close-fitting bonnet. The thought of leaving his children for an indefinite number of years was more than he could bear and he drank in every detail of her little person to imprint it on his memory. The baby sighed in its sleep, heaving its whole body.

Just then the noise of horses' hooves on cobbles made itself audible in the distance.

'What is that?' said Madame Poisson.

They clutched at one another and listened. In a short time some horsemen had stopped outside the house, the knocker clanged on the great iron door.

Poisson gave one look at the tot. 'Make haste,' whispered his wife, pushing him. 'You can get away by climbing the attic stairs on to the roof and dropping down by the balcony at the back and then into the garden. The wall is not too high.'

He was gone in a moment. They had not said farewell. In half an hour's time, breathless and shaken, he was hidden in the recesses of his coach, armed with his passport for the city gates, little coffers of ill-gotten gold and a pistol.

The dawn was straggling into life over the monastery of hermits on Mont Valérien. Poisson peeped through the curtain to watch, for the last time, the fascinating picture of the

## PARIS STREET LIFE

town awakening—the shutters opening, the little milk-girl carrying a pot on her head, the coffee merchant stirring his jug, the gardeners coming in from the suburbs, leading their donkey carts full of baskets of gardenias, tuberoses, campanulas and fuchsias, a *poissarde* pushing her barrow and screaming in strident tones: ‘Here is mackerel still alive, he’s not DEAD, alive, alive—O, here he is, here he is . . . O!’ . . . Delicious impressions and doubly dear to one about to forgo them. Now and again he passed coaches with yellow shafts and red wheels bearing young noblemen home after a night’s carousal, heedless of the Mass bells which were ringing from convent and priory. At her window, a little *grisette* he knew would be hanging her canary cage near the sill among the wreathing convolvulus. Already in the poorer quarters he could hear that sinister cry of the hawker of brandy: ‘La vie! La vie!’ and knew that some unfortunate wretches would drink that fiery poison to dull their awareness of life’s sharp nip. ‘Ha!’ he thought, ‘anyway, *I* have never harmed the poor.’ A girl carrying crockery in a basket interrupted his thoughts with her cry of ‘De la belle faïence’; a flower-girl was singing as she arranged little woodland bouquets for the long basket which she hawked about on her back. He knew that he would not feel at home in the cleanliness of the German towns; he’d miss those warm stable smells pouring out of the street cowsheds, those open church doors from which came the effluvia of newly opened vaults, those staircases which stank of the privy. . . .

A group of drabs, their cheeks smothered in rouge, were sitting near a boundary milestone; they hurled a shower of rich invective on two demure girls hurrying to Mass with their petticoats lifted out of the mud. Yes, and he would miss the ladies of doubtful virtue, the oyster suppers, the sucking-pig holding a lemon in its teeth, with white ribbons on its paws and smelling of truffles, the evenings drinking Tokay

## MONSIEUR POISSON ESCAPES THE GALLOWS

with a wench on each knee, the laughter, the songs, the dice, the secure cosy familiarity.

A coachman of a rickety cab crying 'Ware!' made him draw in his head like a snail for fear of being seen. He peeped forth one last time to bid good-bye to the Seine with its barges full of passengers and its bathing establishments announced by the equivocal notice whose humour he had never seen: 'Cabines de bains isolés pour dames publiques et particulières.' (Single bathing cabins for ladies, public and private.)

He shivered as he saw a three-day-old corpse of some felon hanging from the gallows and swaying in the wind. To think what he had escaped!

Soon he had passed beyond the city gate and was bumping merrily along in the suburbs. He had come straight out into the country; it was difficult to imagine the seething town within the boundary. He met more little carts going to market, full of butter, eggs, cheese and thyme; then a stage-coach loaded with exhausted visitors from the provinces. The coachmen greeted each other with a courtesy which would have surprised their descendants of to-day, whose speech is more vociferous than urbane. Indeed, in that century a butcher was once thrown into prison for saying 'nom-de-Dieu'. As for the outskirts of Paris, an Englishwoman, Helen Williams, said at the very eve of the Revolution how well they compared with those of London, for as soon as you were out of the barrier there were little vine-dressed hillocks, fields, woods, green meadows and grazing places so unfrequented that the only sounds to be heard were the sheep bells and the songs of the birds. No mortal in sight save perhaps an old white-bearded shepherd watching over his flock with his dog.

Now we must take leave for about nine years of the unfortunate Monsieur Poisson as he trundles away in a cloud of dust along the road which saw Marie-Antoinette and Louis XVI escaping to Varennes in 1791. Little did Poisson know that

## A POLICE SEARCH

their fate was to be greatly precipitated by the deeds of the baby girl he had left behind in her cradle. He was unwitting of his child's enormous importance in the tragedy that is French history of the late eighteenth century.

When Madame Poisson had seen the red heel of her spouse disappear through the closet door, she blew out the candles and hastily got into bed, put the pillow next to her own under her head, shut her eyes and waited. When at length the King's officers burst into the room followed by a huddle of prying servants, she had regained her calm, for she knew he'd had time to make good his escape. She tried to look amazed.

'There was a light in this room,' thundered the officer in charge, 'you cannot deny it, Madame, your husband is concealed in this house.'

'Sh!' implored Madame, putting on her most appealing air—and she was famed for that in her day—'You will wake the children.' Just then Abel, waking and seeing a strange man with a sword, let forth a frenzied squeal which was echoed a moment later by Toinette. In a trice the pair of them were hiccoughing as if they would choke.

'Search the house,' said the officer. The soldiers, after probing very thoroughly and finding nothing, decided to ransack the bedroom. They looked under the bed, in the powdering closet, beneath the frills of the dressing table, even up in the canopy of the bed and behind the damask curtains. Nothing. They muttered with suspicion and discomfiture. They were about to retire in dudgeon when a terrible sneeze issued from the upper region of the mantelpiece. 'Bonico, Bonico!' said the captain, brightening. They all listened. There was a dreadful silence in which even the babies stopped mewling. And suddenly, another Gargantuan sneeze. They surrounded the chimney and were about to poke their lances up it when Madame Poisson whimpered, 'All ye Saints of Heaven,

## MONSIEUR POISSON ESCAPES THE GALLOWS

preserve him!' Just then, in a shower of soot, there fell into the hearth a gentleman called Monsieur Charles de Tournehem; he was in his nightshift and without his wig. The soldiers and officers stared for one second at the disconsolate shivering individual, covered in soot and sneezing loud enough to wake the dead; then they all burst out laughing. The captain, realizing that the lover would not be here if Monsieur Poisson were in the vicinity, and sympathizing with the situation, bade Madame an ambiguously polite 'Bonne nuit' and led his men away: they were still holding their sides. With many titterings and obscene jokes they retired, leaving the lovers standing transfixed.

When the sound of the last hoof had faded in the distance, Madame Poisson turned archly to Charles: 'Have I not been skilful?' she said.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PASSING OF THE ROI SOLEIL

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*Illness of Louis XIV. Louis XV is brought to him for farewell. Louis XIV dies of a gangrenous leg. Watteau not representative of the Regency. The social troubles caused by Law. The drinking, debauchery, indecency. The Bishop of Beauvais and other strange examples. Corrupt administration. The typical face and dress of the Regency woman. Sermons against panniers. The sudden death of the Regent.*

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*'Celui qui est né pour régner doit savoir qu'il n'est pas destiné à mener une vie tranquille dans le repos et les délices, mais plutôt à mener une vie laborieuse et sujette à beaucoup de périls.'* (LOUIS XV's copy-book as a child.)

Early in 1715 the popinjays at Versailles began to ask one another in whispers: 'What ails his Majesty?' Louis XIV had been ill for the last year. He seemed to have shed his true self the day he married the Maintenon. He was still sumptuous, but in a more sombre way; and piety never suited him. The plays acted by the ladies of St.-Cyr aroused no spark of enthusiasm on his fine, rather cynical countenance. The uneasy Maintenon, glancing sideways at him, began to wonder if he was thinking of his buried loves. The outward mechanism of his day remained unchanged—work with his ministers, supervision of garden-planning, businesslike attendance at Mass and Vespers, hunting, concerts of sacred music in his private apartments—but the boundless enjoyment of his prime had gone for ever. In the spring his weakness became apparent. He com-



## THE PASSING OF THE ROI SOLEIL

plained casually of fatigue, nausea, headache—all those ailments which had peevéd him in others and which he had so ruthlessly disregarded. Madame de Maintenon would hear of no other doctor but tall-hatted Fagon, who was too antiquated for his job. On the eleventh of August Louis strolled majestically at Trianon. The next day, he felt such a sharp pain in his left leg that he could walk no more. The Maintenon forgot what a gall he'd been to her and became discreetly lachrymose into a kerchief of finest lawn. He said, 'Have I not lived long enough? Did you think me immortal?'

He sent for a private box and burnt the papers it contained. The letters of Louise de La Vallière and Athénaïs de Montespan probably met their fate at that moment, much to the sorrow of historians.

On August 26th his great-grandson the dauphin, who was to be Louis XV, then a child of five and a half, was brought by his hen-like governess Madame de Ventadour and placed in an armchair by the bedside draperies of the dying man. Louis XIV turned his head towards him. His eyes filled with tears as he surveyed the dignified little personage sitting up very straight and staring at him. The boy's skin which but lately had been yellow and glistening, sticking to the bones from ill health, was still very pale, and the frailty of his appearance was enhanced by a head of yellow curls, each hair of which stood out like a thread of glistening gold. The child looked a little pathetic, as royal orphans do; he had velvety eyes and a spoilt rosebud of a mouth.

The King said: '*Mignon*, one day you will become the greatest king in the world; never forget your fealty to God.' Then raising his eyes to Heaven and joining his hands, he prayed in that surprisingly loud voice he always reserved for His Celestial Majesty: 'Lord, I offer him to Thee, this child. Grant him the favour to serve and honour Thee in a way

## DEATH OF LOUIS XIV

worthy of a most Christian King and to make Thee adored and respected by all the peoples of his kingdom.'

The little boy, frightened by the booming of the voice, burst into loud sobs and was hastily taken away by his governess along the shining floors of the palace.

Louis XIV's leg became gangrenous like a corpse's. Five days later, on the first of September, he entered upon his death agony with the same aristocratic courage with which he had met all other exigencies. In his last prayers he addressed the Deity in forcible majestic style as if he were speaking to another earthly potentate: his orisons drowned those of the multitude of ecclesiastics clustered around him. Then for five hours the death rattle was heard. He died at a quarter past eight in the morning. His face became a waxen mask. The most remarkable reign in French history came to an end.

What a legacy for the child! The country, which was already in a state of great poverty and disunion due to the prolonged wars, corrupt administration and religious quarrels, was to be plunged into greater chaos by the advent of the Regent. When one says the word *Régence* deceptive visions of Watteau are conjured up. One forgets that Watteau's most famous picture, 'L'Embarquement pour Cythère', which has been called 'a masterpiece of capricious *volupté*', was conceived quite a long time before the death of Louis XIV and indicated a reaction against the tyranny of the Maintenon. This melancholy painter, with his haunting sadness, his delicious idleness, his world of refined and nonchalant people dressed in the costumes of Italian opera, was in reality sober and reserved. This creator of gay supper-parties and idyllic love-scenes, enchanted by the sound of guitars under immense trees and the wan smile of Grecian deities, was a poet with an affinity to Mozart. He could not epitomize the spirit of the *Régence*, for he was incapable of depravation. He

## THE PASSING OF THE ROI SOLEIL

painted no obscene pictures and a few days before his death burnt several sketches of which he was doubtful. In him the artist and the Christian were at one. In his death agony, when the curé de Nogent held up a badly carved crucifix before his eyes, he found strength to cry out: 'Take away that crucifix, it moves me to pity; is it possible that they have treated my Master so badly?' His art was an escape from the realities of the early part of the century, the dream of a summer night; his gaiety concealed a haunting sadness, his luminous skies were always of the sunset, the sunset of the *Roi Soleil*.

How different from the lovers in Watteau's languorous world are the men and women of the Regency! It is only fair to the much maligned Louis XV for the historian to preface the reign by stating the evil which Law's banking system caused to the balance of classes in society, a balance so essential for stability. Two months after Louis XIV's death, on October 24th, 1715, the system of Law was first placed before the Council. It was in reality the modern idea of banking with paper money instead of gold, and people realized that these magic notes would save the expenses, troubles and insecurities which had attended the transport of gold in the past. The colonial commerce of the Mississippi was to be exploited by the money of the investors. Doubtless all would have been well had not the investors of all classes of society been seized simultaneously by a childish desire to 'get rich quick', and started claiming their money all at the same time. The prince de Conti alone sent three carts to the bank for gold in return for his paper. Soon the bank was empty. The valets and riff-raff who had got there first became immensely wealthy and the *grands seigneurs*, many of whom had been too late, were ruined and had to put their houses up for auction. Amazing scenes followed, some tragic, others not devoid of a certain humour which the Parisian would be quick to seize upon. In

## ORGIES AND LACKEYS

the rue Richelieu on the way to the bank the crowd was so thick that people were suffocated and then carried on dead by the solid mass. Only at the other end was it noticed that they were corpses. On July 17th, 1720, fifteen people were smothered in the rue Vivienne.

Lackeys who had become mushroom millionaires over night took a little time to get used to their new social status: it seems that one, from force of habit, brought round his own carriage and, forgetting that he was the owner of it, climbed in at the back. His servant shouted: 'Hi there, mister, the coach is yours,' and the *nouveau-riche* lackey replied: 'Ah, that's true, I'd forgotten.'

A certain Madame Bégon saw her cook in a box at the Opéra, and the young men in the pit, catching her expletives of surprised wrath, began to sing: 'Marie la cuisinière, Marie la cuisinière.'

The result of all this sudden reversal of the established order was disastrous. Those with money and without the sense of responsibility handed down in old families felt free to lead a life of pleasure; they gave parties so frenzied that they rapidly degenerated into orgies. The suppers given by the Regent himself did much towards lowering the ethical standards of the country. His daughter would get dead drunk and splash all the guests at table with her repeated vomitings. Indeed all the conditions for serious social trouble were assembled. Members of the lowest classes of society, women from the gutter, were now through the power of money on an equal footing with the nobility. Financial speculators and profiteers grew avid for luxury and spurned contemptuously all the lords and gentry now at their mercy and crawling before them. Everywhere there was reckless extravagance with money, and the spectacle of millions gained without work. Old families whirled in a vertigo of fear and despair as they saw their money and estates suddenly gone; everyone felt the universal

## THE PASSING OF THE ROI SOLEIL

insecurity and the desire to stave off reality by hectic gaiety. The favourite amusement was to don a disguise and seek adventures by losing one's way in the dark thickets which were then the Champs Élysées. Liselotte, the old Madame d'Orléans, wrote that the debauchery was general and appalling. It was the accepted fashion to be drunk every night; at the prince de Conti's the guests fought like turkey-cocks, and the lackeys picked them up next morning among the débris of china and glass. Even educated women were not immune from the general fever. Mesdames du Deffand and de Tencin—*très parfumées*—the latter an escaped nun—were among those to be found at the Regent's orgies at the Palais-Royal. Women and girls were incredibly degraded in their *amours*: the drunken duchesse de Berry, the Regent's favourite daughter, who liked listening to obscene stories, had dozens of lovers from anywhere, her last paramour, Rion, being fat, of a green and yellow colour, and covered with spots which resembled abscesses. She died at twenty-four.

The marquise de Nesle and the marquise de Polignac both loved the marquis d'Alincourt; they arranged a meeting behind the Invalides and slashed at one another with knives till one had her face torn and the other her breast.

In such an age, religion was bound to suffer. The Regent himself at Mass was seen to smile into his Book of Hours, which was nothing but a volume of Rabelais covered to look like a prayer book. Is it surprising that Mercier asked how many bishops, abbés and canons ever said their breviary regularly?<sup>1</sup> The Bishop of Beauvais kept a mistress in the episcopal palace, taking her through the town with him each day in the ceremonial coach. Soon she was bundled into the rescue house called Les Madelonnettes. The Regent, to whom the bishop appealed in despair, consoled him by saying: 'There are so many other good strumpets in Paris besides

<sup>1</sup> I think the country curés remained sound.

## THE CORPSE

that one.' In the end his feminine consolers ruined him and he had to be locked up in the Abbey of Cîteaux.

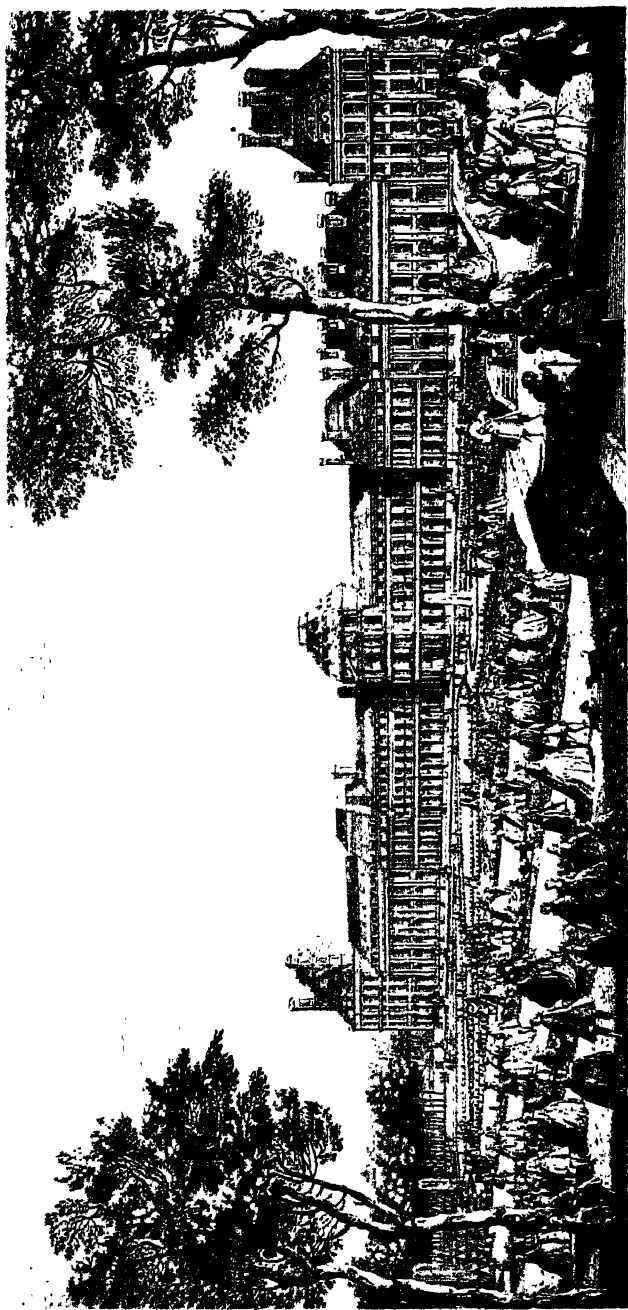
Holy places were respected no more. A barrister, *Sieur Nigon*, died, his body was placed in the cloister of *St. Germain l'Auxerrois* under a mortuary sheet and surrounded by funeral tapers. His friend the *duc d'Arenberg*, together with his companions and a retinue of lackeys who had all drunk well but not wisely, wandered that night into the church, grasping their bottles and glasses. One of these gentlemen, espying *Nigon*, lifted the mortuary sheet and apostrophised the corpse: 'My poor *Nigon*, what are you doing there? Come and swill a dram with us.' And sitting saddle-legged on the bier he drenched him with the contents of the holy-water stoup. 'Here, drink, my poor *Nigon*, for you died of thirst.' The clergy arrived. The mourners formed a procession and began bawling out indecent couplets. The priests protested and were smothered with insults. When the church was reached, the mourners started braying alleluias in the choir-stalls. The police had to intervene. The *duc d'Arenberg* fell dead drunk on the way home.

Much of the administrative corruption of the time was due to the fact that the Regent gave too much authority to Parliament, for he felt he owed his position to its support. One day he began to notice that the royal power would be compromised if he went on allowing the parliamentarians their role of 'fathers of the people'. There was a typical case of the official in the financier father of the *marquise de Prie*, who caused the soldiers in the military hospitals for which he was responsible to die of hunger by appropriating their money, and when they were dead, left their names on his account books as if they were still alive, so that he could continue to get it. One can see that it was not only the nobles who laid the foundations of the Revolution at the end of the century.

## THE PASSING OF THE ROI SOLEIL

A tour of the early Regency portraits in any French picture gallery or salon will show one the woman's face which was most fashionable at the time: the first type emerging from the end of Louis XIV's reign is found in an Olympus of princesses, advancing as on the clouds of a mythological triumph. They have little narrow low foreheads, hard thick large eyebrows; the eye is big, round, open, almost fixed. There is an expression of imperious effrontery mingled with the ardour of obstinate desire. Sometimes there is a certain pagan serenity very different from the superb repose in the many grave Christian faces of the seventeenth century. These countenances with their leonine noses, thick, fleshy mouths, their well-fed cheeks rubicund with health and violent *rouge d'Espagne*, are not endearing, but somehow they hypnotise by a certain majestic immodesty. They are the sated Junos of antiquity.

The fashions followed the mutations of woman's physiognomy in the strange way they have always done. Women borrowed clothes from the immortals in Ovid's Olympus to fill their wardrobes—the flying deities emerged from the clouds scantily clad, nymph-like, in gauze and silk, girdled with flowers and with a star on their foreheads. But this represents the rage for carnivals given by people like the marquise de Prie: the normal dress of that period is to be found in the panniers brought into fashion in 1718 by two English ladies. The coiffure became simple and low, with small crisped curls—a relief after the high edifice of the Fontanges. Little turned-back lace bonnets were worn. The big dress, known from the pictures of Watteau, reappeared in 1725; it fell straight from the neck, very free and wide; it was, in fact, almost shapeless and floated like a large dressing-gown. Its amplitude had been fashioned, not for the modesty of virginity, but to cover up the shameful pregnancies of the *Régence*. A cloak for bawdiness during the days of folly, the 'Watteau robe' gradually became modish as the century progressed.



## LES PROMENADES DU PALAIS DES THUILLERIES

From an engraving by Rigaud

*Photograph : W. F. Mansell*



## INDECENCY IN DRESS

The following ditty about panniers was sung in the streets:

*Là, là, chantons la pretintaille en falbalas,  
Elles tapent leurs cheveux;  
L'échelle à l'estomac,  
Dans le pied une petite mule  
Qui ne tient pas,  
Habit plus d'étoffe  
Qu'à six carrosses  
Pretintailles.*

In the ballets the costumes, whether short or long, and even for men, were always put over panniers. In a comedy of 1724, Harlequin, dressed up as a woman selling panniers, cried: 'J'ay des bannes, des cerceaux, des panniers, des vollons, des criades . . . j'en ay des solides qui ne peuvent se lever pour les prudes, de plians pour les galantes, de mixtes pour les personnes du tiers état. . . ' Women were deaf to the fulminations of preachers against panniers. Le Menar called the women who donned them '*guenuches*' or 'she-monkeys' or 'the devil's janitors'. Still wearing the offending garment, women went to hear these very sermons, holding out their panniers ostentatiously with their two hands. They considered the pannier gave their figure elegance and majesty, an air of opulent ronditude.

But if their gait and apparel were of starched stateliness, both starch and state were lacking in their demeanour. Later on, in the middle of the century, nudity would take on the air of an artistic *déshabillé*: art, the thief of bashfulness, would resemble the little laughing Cupid in Fragonard's '*La Chemise enlevée*', but without completely robbing woman of her fundamental integrity. During the *Régence*, however, there was a complete loss of the moral sense. Madame du Deffand, then a young woman, went one hot day with her friends to a pub called La Maison Rouge in the village of Chaillot (where the Trocadéro now stands) and the women were not ashamed to

## THE PASSING OF THE ROI SOLEIL

be very scantily clad in front of the lackeys, in a manner which, even allowing for the obliviousness to the presence of underlings which is typical of the well-bred, was truly remarkable. The way Madame de Châtelet is supposed to have asked a certain valet Longchamp later on in the century to add water to her bath recalls the amorality of the Roman ladies who were scrubbed and oiled by black slaves; here was the cynicism which almost always precedes the decay of an over-ripe civilization. If other women, like the duchesse d'Enville, received in their baths, she, at least, put on a sack or covered the bath with a board or clouded the water with scented milk. The loss of this sense of personal honour has many illustrations, from the duchesses cheating at the Queen's card-table and the incident when a servant found two of Madame du Deffand's well-born guests forcing the lock of her private desk, to the terrible story of the young widow whom Madame de Prie and some feline nobles seized, made tipsy, stripped, and then nearly blew up with a firework.

But these Medusa-heads which make one shiver like an aspen-leaf only flourished for approximately eight years—quite long enough, however, to pervert several succeeding generations. By 1723 the Regent Philippe d'Orléans<sup>1</sup> had become exhausted both mentally and physically. Liverish and coarse, his body had thickened with the decay of his mind, his face was red, his neck rolled with fat. He indulged in long sleeps after supper and often thought of Death. On December 2nd at Versailles, at six o'clock in the evening, in the room at the angle of the ground floor near the Orangery, the curtains had been drawn and the shutters closed by the footmen. Philippe had a heavy head and a sick stomach. The duchesse de Falaris, a tiny lively blonde, came to visit him. He said:

<sup>1</sup> Who was the son of Liselotte, Princesse Palatine, and Philippe d'Orléans, brother to Louis XIV.

## SUDDEN DEATH OF THE REGENT

'Your stories will distract me.' He sat by the chimney looking with unseeing eyes.

'Your stories will distract me,' he repeated. Then suddenly: 'Do you believe in good faith that there is a God, that there is Hell and Paradise after this life?'

'Yes, my prince, I believe it for a surety.'

'If that is as you say, you are then very wretched to lead the life you do.'

She replied: 'I hope, however, that God will be merciful to me.'

He said: 'Well, go on with your story-telling.'

At this point he uttered a cry, gave a violent start and fell senseless to the ground.

Assistance was very difficult to obtain, as the servants, who thought the Regent was with the King, had for the moment left the ground floor. The duchesse de Falari called in vain. Then she left Philippe alone and ran out into the courtyard where it was night and very cold. At last lackeys answered to her cries. Then it took another half-hour to find a surgeon. At half-past seven, Philippe d'Orléans, Regent of France, died without regaining consciousness. Unfortified by shrift, housel or sacred anointing he went forth to answer for the sins of the epoch which his removal had brought to a sudden close.

### CHAPTER III

## THE CHILDHOOD OF THE KING

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*Louis XV's ill health. He has vapours in the cradle. Melancholy. Childhood games. Affection. Aristocratic tutor. Louis' regal air. Shown off to Peter the Great and Mahomet Effendi. Not questioned in Confessional. Reputed cruelty to animals. Love of teasing. Maxims. Lessons. Instruction in politics. Idleness and apathy. Thinks he'll escape damnation. Morals. Flees women. Hunting and eating. Anxiety to get him married at sixteen. His bride seven years older.*

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*'I promise that I will never listen to idle tattle because evil conversations corrupt good manners.'* (LOUIS XV's copy-book, written in his childish hand, in the Bibliothèque Nationale.)

Louis XV, the heir to all this instability and corruption, moral, financial and religious, was nearly fourteen when his uncle the Regent died. Because his health had been so bad that it had disorganized his whole nature, he was unfit by temperament to shoulder this burden; and his incapacity was increased by his education, which was misguided rather than thoroughly neglected, as some historians have tried to make out. Born at eight in the morning of February 15th, 1710, he was the son of the duc de Bourgogne (Fénelon's pupil) and of that Adélaïde de Savoie who had brightened the court of the ageing Louis XIV. While all around him were perishing with the measles, he owed his life to the negligence of the doctors. His women kept the little body warm and obstinately refused to have him bled. The duchesse de Ventadour took charge of the orphan; she resembled a good old sheep-dog, very tender and vigilant, and always a little an-

## A SPOILT CHILD

xious and out of breath: Louis adored her. He was so delicate that he nearly died at two years old and hardly breathed till he was five. The letters of the duchesse to Madame de Maintenon—who was an expert on the health of children—tell one how his early lessons and upbringing were neglected that the body might have a chance. He was crossed in nothing lest he get into a pet. So he became sulky, pig-headed and unpleasantly mischievous. The duchesse d'Orléans says he was a badly brought-up child. 'When he is fit, he's a fine child. He has big eyes, very black. . . .' The Maintenon writes: 'One talks of nothing else but the sulky looks of the King and his ill humour.' In 1716 the duchesse de Ventadour writes again to the Maintenon, now in retirement at St.-Cyr: 'He is a child you have to handle carefully, for by habit he is not gay, and pleasures of an exciting nature will be harmful because they will make too many demands on him. . . . You will laugh at me if I tell you that he has the vapours; nothing however is more true, and he had them in the cradle. Hence those melancholy looks, and his need to be livened up, wakened up. You can do anything you like with him so long as you don't speak to him crossly.'

He was a rude child: when he saw the Bishop of Metz, he said: 'Ah, my God, how ugly he is.' At six he distinguished himself by his surprising absorption in the sermons of court preachers, an attention which was to stand him in good stead later on when, in the midst of his sins, he would remember some homily on Hell-fire and give a salutary shudder. He was sharp: he said to Villeroy, who was admonishing a cat which had scratched him: 'As for that, grandpapa, don't you know very well that my cat doesn't like chidings any more than my uncle the Regent?'

We have a precious and most fascinating little document about his boyhood—a journal kept during the first half of 1722 by the young marquis de Calvière, who used to play

## THE CHILDHOOD OF THE KING

with him. We are surprised to find that he led quite a normal life full of games and fun, and that when he was with people of his own age he behaved quite charmingly, showering gifts on his small companions—Easter eggs, a watch, copies of the Catechism, medals, a whip, balls, a cup and ball set, comfits. The journal tells us of walks, outdoor excursions, shrimping expeditions, games of shuttlecock, balloon, hopscotch and soldiers; on a rainy day they would dress up, grate chocolate, turn the leaves of old newspapers, take mechanical toys to pieces. . . . Louis was turbulent but yielding. One day he was rather sad. Neurasthenia? No, just toothache; and he would not complain as he was frightened of having the tooth out. He had a horror of crowds and unknown faces, probably because he was made to show off at too early an age.

Very soon the day came for him to say good-bye to Maman Ventadour and the women, and be handed over to men for his education. When Ventadour went, he clung to her skirts with all the force of his little hands and wept and called out:

‘Maman! Maman!’

She, trying not to weep herself, said: ‘You must listen to reason.’

He cried: ‘Ah Maman, I don’t know what reason is when I have to leave you.’

That night he sent her a cross of diamonds and the ring of the last dauphin. He never forgot his foster-mother, and even when he was nearly grown-up and already married he wrote her the following note: ‘I kiss you, Maman, with all my heart and await the moment of seeing you again very impatiently.’

He was handed over to the *maréchal de Villeroy* before the Regent’s death and then to *Fleury*. The *maréchal*, aged seventy-four, was a tragedy prince, with the manners of a *grand seigneur* and the conversation, the distant politeness which go with that kind of thoroughbred. Yet he was dry and

## THE ENVOY OF MAHOMET EFFENDI

vigorous and took his responsibility seriously, if in somewhat eccentric fashion. He kept the boy's handkerchiefs under triple lock and key. He played the comedy of the guardian angel against unknown poisoners lurking in the shade to pollute the King's bread and butter. And then he was such a master of deportment! He succeeded in giving to Louis an air so regal that in a short time the people of Paris, who adored him and had watched his career from the cradle with enormous interest, deemed him 'the most handsome man in the whole kingdom.' That is probably the only lesson Louis ever absorbed properly. Villeroy tired the child out with revues and displays. In 1720, when he was only ten, he had been made to dance in a public ballet of young lords and opera girls at the Tuileries; he had two entrances alone, and there were five performances, while Villeroy, in the audience, beamed at the doll of his fashioning.

In 1717 the tsar Peter the Great had visited France and been charmed with the beauty and manners of the child. In 1721 Mahomet Effendi sent an ambassador to the court of France. This scene is described by the envoy of the Sultan and will speak for itself:

'He took delight in examining our dresses, our daggers, one after another. Maréchal Villeroy asked me, "What do you think of the beauty of our King?" "May God be praised," I replied, "and may He preserve him from all malefaction." [Villeroy then said] "He is only eleven years and four months. Is not his figure well-proportioned; notice particularly that this is his own hair." And so saying he made the King turn round and, caressing him as he did so, I examined his hyacinth locks. They were like separate golden threads and reached down to his waist. "His carriage", said the tutor, "is also very beautiful." He then said to the King: "Walk a few steps." Louis XV, with the magnificent strut of a partridge, went to the middle of the room, and then came back. "Walk faster,"

## THE CHILDHOOD OF THE KING

added the maréchal, "to show off your lightness in running." At once the King began to run very quickly. The tutor then asked me if I did not find him agreeable. "May the God Almighty, who has created so beautiful a creature, bless him," I replied.'

At the feast of St. Louis, Villeroy took the boy to a window of the Tuileries and showed him the mob cheering with all its might: 'Look, my master, look at all that populace, that crush of people, all that is yours.' How much better had he told him that the King belongs to the people. Villeroy kept him aloof from others, did not encourage him to take part in affairs, countenanced the mixed conceit and shyness in his character, and his aversion for all that concerned the duties of kingship.

Louis' faults grew, unchecked even by the discipline of the Confessional—for he confessed in writing, to a Jesuit priest, Père Linières, who was forbidden to ask him any questions. One wonders what the Pope said to this abuse of the Sacrament if he heard of it.

A story about a deer, spread from hearsay by Barbier, gave Louis an early reputation for cruelty to animals which is refuted by the account of an eye-witness, his playmate the young marquis de Calvière, who writes in his journal for April 30th, 1722: 'As the King was returning from La Muette to the Château, I got near the door of his open carriage; a very pretty little fallow deer was following us, she eats paper and is not frightened by the shots which the King fires at her ears with his gun.' The King certainly adored cats and killed off some kittens by playing with them too hard (sad foreshadowing). Saint-Simon says that he would come often to the Council during the Regency and sit 'without moving or speaking, playing with a young cat', which the caustic writer calls 'his colleague'.

Villeroy's training encouraged his latent haughtiness, superstitious fears, lack of openness and appearance of insensibility.





*Louis-Quinze*  
*Roy de France et de Navarre.*

LOUIS XV AS A CHILD

From an engraving in the British Museum by Audran  
after the painting by Gobert

## PRACTICAL JOKES

The evil was already done when the Regent, who had a real affection for Louis, wanted to dismiss Villeroy. As he imagined everything was permitted to him owing to his exalted position and his abundance of personal charm, Louis indulged in a malicious love of teasing—a trait which remained with him all his life and earned him many rancours. He liked tiring the *maréchal de Noailles* by long walks, he smacked his valet, threw soft cheese at the head of an *abbé*, cut his equerry's eyebrows, aimed an arrow into the stomach of *Monsieur de Souches*.

His education, though inadequate, was not as bad as one is allowed to believe. (*Bernis* says that *Fleury*, who succeeded *Villeroy*, allowed the boy to put curlers into his grey hair. The embittered *Argenson* said that *Quintus Curtius* stayed open for six months at the same page.) *Fleury* did not try to make him a King, but to assure for himself the place of first minister by winning his affections. They played card games together. *Fleury* never contradicted him, and even when he was married played with him at vaulting over a wooden horse. There are copy-books in Louis' careful handwriting at the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, full of admirable sentiments on kingship and with many references to *St. Louis*, whom he was taught to regard as an ideal monarch, easy of access, pious without bigotry, sober, just, continent, liberal, etc., etc. How the child must have yawned! It was like stuffing good wheat into a bin with holes at the bottom—the foundation of the character had been undermined and no amount of pious bolstering could right it. He chose what suited him in these maxims and rejected the rest, as for instance in this one: 'When *St. Louis* was living as a private individual, he was very simple in all his tastes and principally in his clothes, but when occasion and the honour of the Kingdom demanded that he should appear with pomp, he surpassed all others in magnificence.'

The curriculum of his studies was catholic in its breadth:

## THE CHILDHOOD OF THE KING

Latin and history every day, and, three times a week, geography, for which he showed a pronounced taste, astronomy, drawing, mathematics and botany—which he learnt in the gardens of Trianon under Claude Richard the horticulturist, who taught him how to graft trees. It was probably due to Richard's influence that he always took such an interest in his trees and shrubs.

He was given trial instruction in politics by experts. Some records of these lessons have been kept. Judging by results, the lesson on the revenue of the Kingdom, intelligent as it was, left no trace on Louis' mind. It begins: 'The King can only be as rich as his subjects.' In another article there is a statement that there is no legitimate foundation to be recognized for the fiscal privileges of the Church, which were only begun in favour of poor priests. Louis probably remembered this on the day, many years later, when the clergy refused to pay a small tax although the country was going bankrupt.

As he was given no sense of responsibility, he saw no reason for over-exertion. His laziness and egoism one day appalled Fleury himself, who had lectured him on the idle Kings of France called '*rois fainéants*'. Apparently haunted by his words, Louis asked him anxiously whether these monarchs were allowed a pension when they retired! Fleury was at the head of affairs. He left no initiative to the King. As in many other persons of that ilk, his modesty only served his ambition. In order to achieve his ends and hold the reins in his own fingers, Fleury crushed all originality and independent ambition in his pupil. From being naturally indolent through ill health, Louis, under his tutelage, lost all energy and self-reliance. Later in life he always took the line of least resistance, and was at the mercy of any competent minister who could relieve him of responsibility. Fleury secured his own position by making the King distrust everybody but himself, and ever afterwards the habit of cynical suspicion was deeply

## LOUIS FEARS WOMAN

rooted in Louis' dealings with his ministers. When Louis had reached manhood, the notorious Madame de Tencin wrote to the duc de Richelieu:

'What my brother has been able to say to him, has been useless; one might as well talk to the rocks. I cannot understand a man who could be everything and who prefers to remain a cipher. Anyone but yourself would refuse to credit the length to which matters have gone. He pays not the least heed to what is passing in the Kingdom; nothing seems to interest him; in the Council he displays the most absolute indifference; he signs everything that is put before him. In truth, to have anything to do with such a person is enough to drive one to despair. It is remarked that in every case he inclines to the course which promises the least amount of trouble, and that is generally the worst one.'<sup>1</sup>

One good thing Fleury did and one must stress it in all fairness: he gave the boy a thorough moral training and instilled in him a respect for religion, so that, whereas Louis XIV was unfaithful to his wife within the first year of marriage, Louis XV was for eight years certainly, and ten years possibly, true to his marriage vows. Bernis says of him: 'The King is religious; for his own behaviour as a Christian he has never wished to follow any but the most severe counsels; he would prefer to abstain from the Sacraments rather than profane them. . . . His predilection for women has been victorious over his love for religion. . . .' Once during a religious jubilee, when he showed signs of repenting of his sins, he seemed to be more occupied with the scandal he gave than the peril to his own soul, for he thought he was certain of salvation; he confessed one day to Choiseul his belief in a strange tradition, ill understood, inculcated in childhood: he imagined that the merits of St. Louis reached down to all his descendants and that no king of his race could be damned, so long as he

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Sainte-Beuve—*Causeries du Lundi*, II, 382.

## THE CHILDHOOD OF THE KING

avoided being unjust to his subjects and did not show hardness to underlings. In his complacency he accused Frederick the Great of having no moral principles.

As a young man Louis was taught by Fleury to fear Hell, to flee women like the plague, to avoid looking at them even. He threw out from Versailles the mistress of one of his *valets de chambre*. When pressed to eat meat in Lent he replied: 'One must not commit sins on all sides.' He was so interested in the rites and ceremonies of the Church that even in later life, in the midst of his sins, he would bore his mistresses with long soliloquies about them. Though this teaching was to come back to him at the end of his life, when it was brought home to him by his daughter Louise becoming a Carmelite nun to save his soul, it was inadequate to restrain him in middle life.

In the *Petit Carême* of Massillon, which contains ten conferences on the duties of those in high position, we read: 'Innocence of life does not suffice for a sovereign, and he must live as a King, to live as a Saint.' Louis was never taught this lesson.

As he passed through his early teens, Louis neglected those lessons in which he was supposed to have 'progressed prodigiously', and began to ride, hunt and shoot. He used to return very hungry from his days in the open air and eat enormous meals. Very soon, being out in all weathers, sun, frost and rain, helped him to acquire robust health. Then Fleury's anxieties began in earnest. His physical vitality and his need for affection, driven underground, came up in twisted form. He conceived too great an affection for the duc de —, who was instantly dismissed and hastily married; and from that time on, his attendant women, ministers, courtiers, fearing this unnatural bent, all tried in vain to inspire him with a taste for women. After a sudden illness in which Fleury himself got into a panic lest his charge should die and the house of Orlé-

## LOUIS HASTILY MARRIED

ans succeed, it was decided that, though he was only sixteen, he should be married with all possible speed. He had been betrothed to a little Spanish Infanta seven years of age, but she had been sent back to Spain. So endless intrigues began, managed mostly by the dissolute marquise de Prie of fire-work fame.

Eventually, because she was poor and therefore dependent—quiet, chaste, and very healthy, the choice fell on Marie Leczinska, only daughter of Stanislas Leczinski, deposed King of Poland, who for some time past had been indebted to Louis for gracious help and hospitality.

Marie was twenty-three.

## CHAPTER IV

### MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON

#### AT HER CONVENT

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*Toinette's parents. Monsieur Charles. Toinette from the middle class. Importance of middle classes in that reign. Louis intrigued by the bourgeoisie. Art and memoirs depict Toinette's childhood. Grown-up clothes. Whalebones. Dancing lessons. Drawing-room of 1730. Madame Poisson. Nuns' letters about Toinette at convent. Her charm, frequent colds. Place of convent in social life of century. Worldly little girls. Toinette fetched back by her mother.*

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*Dans une maison déserte quelque armoire  
Pleine de l'âcre odeur des temps, poudreuse et noire,  
Parfois on trouve un vieux flacon qui se souvient,  
D'où jaillit toute vive une âme qui revient. (BAUDELAIRE.)*

Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson was born in Paris, in the rue de Cléry, in the parish of St. Eustache, on December 29th, 1721. That is certain fact because we possess her baptismal certificate dated December 30th, which says she was 'born yesterday'. Her mother, who already had a son Abel, was the daughter of a Sieur de la Motte, who was responsible for the provisions to the Invalides. Her amorous intrigues had become proverbial. Voltaire, ungrateful and malicious, tried to make out that Madame Poisson was kept by Monsieur Charles Le Normant de Tournhem, and that she exploited the charms of her daughter; others have hinted that Tournhem was actually Toinette's father. He certainly paid for the girl's education and always furthered her interests, but there is no proof of Voltaire's piece of gossip, and old Poisson

## THE RISE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS

loved Antoinette with all the tenderness of authentic paternity. The only possible argument would be deduced from the unlikelihood of a vulgar man like Poisson producing such a creature as Antoinette, who was as fragile as a Saxe porcelain shepherdess. On the other hand the mother was 'one of the best-looking women in Paris and very witty', says Barbier. Someone else repeated that she was 'as clever as a hundred devils'. Bernis said: 'She had not got society manners, but she possessed intelligence, ambition and courage.' She was consoled for the long absence of her husband by the assiduous attentions of the gallant Charles, that wealthy and intelligent bachelor: he was a kind of Lorenzo il Magnifico, friend of artists, lover of art, collector of beautiful objects. Her position was in keeping with the amorality of an age when women did not choose their husbands, and when adultery, so long as it kept within certain façade conventions, did not incur strict censure. Love was not necessary for marriage. Someone said: 'Husband and wife can always live together when they are very well-bred.'

In the face of the many nobles who were furious that Antoinette had usurped the traditional aristocratic privilege of being the King's mistress, it is important to emphasize that she was not bred in the gutter. That may have been true of the du Barry, who was brought up among servants, and reputed to be the daughter of a Franciscan friar and a seamstress, but not of Toinette, who sprang from the middle section of the middle classes and was brought up among rich financiers, some of them enthusiastic connoisseurs in matters of art.

In the eighteenth century, the *bourgeoisie*, by dint of solid worth and hard work, was beginning to acquire an ominous importance. The middle classes consisted no more of the world of freed and enriched people without rights and without name, to whose purse the King was obliged to have



## MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON

recourse during time of war. Louis XIV had even raised the *bourgeoisie* up against the nobility. Its members filled the twelve Parliaments, the benches of judges and magistrates, and many administrative positions. It possessed a quarter of the posts in the Army and provided the Church with a large number of abbés and canons for its hierarchy. The *bourgeois* was solely representative of art and letters; he was responsible for the moral government of public opinion. He reigned by virtue of his enormous wealth acquired in commerce. It was the *bourgeois* more often than the nobles and gentry who could afford those magnificent houses which were built all over France during the eighteenth century, those veritable palaces with their orange-walks, their pictures by the great masters, choice marble tables, Chinese cabinets, glowing Japanese chests of strange odour and lightness. . . . The *bourgeois* was the Maecenas of Louis XV's era. And with every advancing year of his reign, Louis XV was to feel his power and succumb to his fascination. The women, above all, Louis found most droll and bewitching, and much more intelligent than the hook-nosed duchesses of ancient lineage. By pilfering the secrets of the posts he developed an enormous curiosity about the lives and love affairs of his feminine subjects, particularly in Paris. He even fondly imagined that the *bourgeoise* would be less troublesome as a mistress, as she would not be avid in her demands for titles and money and her dismissal would cause no uproar. How mistaken he proved to be! The little Toinette, who ruled at Versailles for nineteen years, from April 1745 to April 1764, had all her father's and her mother's blood running in her veins! Born in the middle classes, all her dreams were to the measure of an average *bourgeoise*, though rich and refined. Her ambition found it hard to fashion itself to great things and had to fall back on details. She was, *au fond*, really commercially minded, thinking in terms of money, of people in relation to their value to her, always giving ser-

## CHILDHOOD OF SMALL GIRLS

vice in expectation of a fair return. To a great extent, she used her power to become a farmer of public revenues. The Monarchy became for her but a leaf from the portfolio of privileges; she did much to degrade the nobility by this passion for finance.

We know something of Toinette from the age of about seven; very little before that. Surmises based on documents and pictures of other tiny girls can be given for what they are worth—they are better than nothing. That century of French art portrayed childhood exquisitely garbed on the canvases of Fragonard, Boucher, Drouais and many others. And there are countless letters and journals from which information may be gleaned.

The baby girl saw little of her mother, as she had a wet-nurse who took charge of her in the country for a year or more. Nursing one's own child only became fashionable with Rousseau. When she returned home, she was brought up by a governess, who, more often than not, spoilt the child to make sure of comfort in her own old age. Toinette played at delightful little lessons in which she learnt geography in a *boîte d'optique* and Scripture from turning the picture pages of the *Bible de Sacy*. She was dressed like a grown-up person, in a bonnet with a posy of flowers at the side, a big apron of transparent tulle, and blue or pink silk dresses on which bouquets were embroidered. Her little harness might be trimmed with feathers. She carried a coral and silver rattle. She played with huge dolls which had brilliant rouge patches on their cheeks, or with a little chariot, or a wooden horse on wheels like the one in Boucher's enchanting picture, 'Le Matin'. She was put into a stiff whaleboned bodice when she could hardly totter. This corrected any natural vivacity, oppressed the body, and even moulded the mind into a set pattern. What fits of hysteria, wrongly called 'the vapours', would she endure in girlhood

## MADemoisELLE ANTOINETTE POISSON

through tight lacing! She played a few games, but was sadly hampered by her panniers. Toinette was not often lonely, for she had a brother to play with, and they were devoted to one another.

At seven she would begin to learn the harpsichord, and once a week a master would come and teach her dancing and deportment. Here is a lifelike description by de Moissay of this important event; the master is repeating to the serious little creature who is holding up her big skirts with the tips of her fingers:

'Keep time. . . . Sustain it. . . . Come along then. . . . Turn here. . . . Too late. . . . Arms limp—head straight. . . . Come along, turn, Mademoiselle. . . . The head a little higher. . . . Glide the step. . . . More boldness in the glance. . . .'

This training produced a forced, hothouse affected little madam who wouldn't endure her mother's lady friends without scent and patches. The tradition of the times was that the interviews with the mother were short, devoid of kisses, and ceremonious, the conversation being limited to admonishments on one's appearance.

Madame Poisson seems to have neglected her a little until she realized that her beauty might be an asset. Toinette, however, grew very attached to her, though not so fond as she was of her scapegoat of a papa; it is unlikely that she was seized with trembling fits before either parent, like many little girls of the nobility.

Lancret's delightful picture, 'L'Hiver', engraved by J. P. le Bas, helps us to guess what Madame Poisson's drawing-room looked like about the year 1730.<sup>1</sup> Lancret has caught a family party; the women are sitting by the chimney where a

<sup>1</sup> That is, if pressing occupations in other directions did not preclude the amenities of a drawing-room; but she was noted for her wit, an accomplishment not learnt in solitude or in the exclusive society of paramours.

## LETTERS FROM NUNS

fire crackles, some looking negligently at music script, others playing at ombre, while a young person teases a cat with a ball of thread. The atmosphere of gentle peace, the coquetry of deportment and the sense of a smiling enjoyment in the present hour conjure up the winter pastimes of life in the country *châteaux*. Madame Poisson would not be sufficiently well-bred or educated to join in or create a literary *salon*, and doubtless her tastes were not for the pleasures of the mind, though she cannot have escaped the civilizing influence of her century altogether. The beautiful things which fired Tournem-hem's enthusiasm were probably looked upon by her more as so many lucrative acquisitions. She was a daughter of the Regency, an age when women could not satisfy their desire for those platonic feasts of the hôtel de Rambouillet.

It was by her father's express wish that Toinette was sent for at least a year, between the ages of eight and nine, to the convent of the Ursuline nuns of Poissy near Paris, where his sister Madame de Sainte-Perpétué was a nun. The six letters from the Superior to Monsieur Poisson in exile, and one from his sister, were recently found in an old *château* of the Marquis de Marigny (Toinette's brother); they were authenticated and placed in the Bibliothèque de Versailles, where they are available to handle and touch if one can persuade the charming *Directeur* that one's intentions are serious. The address is written on a portion of the note-paper itself. The ink is fresh. They are vastly interesting and most precious as a record. Here for instance is one dated September 1729:

'Your *aimable et chère fille*, Monsieur, is full of charm and realizes how lucky she is. Every market day Monsieur de la Motte sends someone to enquire after her, and he takes her out from time to time, with her Deblois cousin, to dine with him, and we have been told that he talks to her a great deal. She is not bored with us; on the contrary, she was delighted

## MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON

to return. On the twenty-fifth of August, the feast of St. Louis, there is a fair at Poissy; we sent her to it with her cousin and one of our *externe* sisters, who showed them all the beautiful and rare things that were to be seen; she also took them to the Abbey, where everybody petted them very much and found them charming; they have since asked for news of them.

‘On the day of the Octave of the Assumption of Our Lady they sang in their classes the Vespers of Our Lady; they were the chief cantors. They love each other, and are inseparable. The mistress of handwriting is working hard to make her fit to write to you herself and tell you in person of her tenderness towards you. Her whole desire is to have the honour of seeing you and embracing you.’

Then there is the one letter from Toinette’s aunt, Madame de Sainte-Perpétué—the contents show why she, instead of the Superior, reported on Toinette. She says she wants Poisson to send his letters direct and not through Madame Poisson, as this lady opens them and therefore knows all he does for the girl: ‘Under the pretext that she imagines that you give her a lot, she gives her, positively, only the bare necessities. I believe well enough that she is not very comfortably off [what innocence!], but the child is very delicate; at the moment she has quite a heavy cold; consequently she needs *douceurs* [spoiling].’ This motherly old nun also gave a message from the child herself: ‘She loves you with all the might of her little heart.’ There are descriptions of how the nuns nursed Toinette’s frequent colds. They put her to bed and kept her warm and gave her chicken and milk and broth; once she showed such a voracious appetite that they began to fear she suffered from . . . Louis XIV’s complaint.

One must not overestimate the part played by the convent in eighteenth-century society. It was no accepted school of holiness, though it answered to a definite social need; it lent

## LITTLE GIRLS IN CONVENTS

an aura of respectability to its lady boarder seeking retreat, and concealed from the world's gaze the many unfortunate girls who could not marry because they were afflicted with smallpox. As an unmarried girl could not be a happy spinster, the convent sheltered many women without real religious vocation. Thus the standard was not very high; in fact, it rarely rose above a pleasant mediocrity. Convents also took in little girls, many of whom had been married at twelve or thirteen to a man of their parents' choice and put back for a time till they were a little older. If certain canonesses themselves wore panniers and big ermine sleeves, what of the precocious girls to whom echoes of the world were conveyed through lenient *externes* sisters? Their very seclusion, interrupted as it was by occasional glimpses of the pleasures of society, gave them a highly coloured picture of life. It is a well-known fact that the convent-bred girl is generally the most worldly during the time immediately following her 'escape' into society. And what tittle-tattle there was at recreation—about the Court, the King, his intrigues even. It was a small girl, a Mademoiselle de Nesle (later Madame de Vintimille), who planned from the obscurity of her convent at Port-Royal to steal the King's affections from her sister, Madame de Mailly. They all were familiar with Versailles from hearsay.

And yet the girls were happy, dramatic escapes were extremely rare; the memory of conventual peace would steal back to the young woman in later life and she would sometimes return to the enclosure for a period of refreshment. One wonders what orisons were breathed for Toinette by the enskied patroness of the nuns, the sedately lovely St. Ursula, immortalized in Carpaccio's picture. One gets a feeling that Poissy was not like those worldly, aristocratic convents in Paris described by the princesse de Ligne, but that it cultivated homelier pleasures. The education, though in no way

## MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON

advanced, cannot have been indifferent, to produce a widely read young woman like Toinette, with her library where serious books found their place among the red, green and citron calf-bindings of plays and love stories. The nuns loved her and called her 'Reinette'; she never forgot them; when she was rich, she endowed her aunt with a pension and contributed to the reparations of the convent.

Madame Poisson did not often come to Poissy; she considered that her duty as a mother had been discharged in providing the child at regular intervals with the bodices and frocks of printed calico, mentioned in one of the Superior's letters. But one day when Toinette had a bad cold, she descended on them, and carried her daughter away with her on the pretext that she must be nursed at home. Toinette never came back. Those who speak of 'le grain de sable de Cromwell' might well add 'le rhume de Toinette' when they muse on great events and little causes.

Toinette did not like going home with Mama very much; it would be lonely, and though Monsieur de Tournehem was kind, he was not like Papa. She snivelled in the coach.

Glancing at her child, Madame Poisson thought: '*Quel lièvre possédé par l'esprit est passé par nos choux?* Had I not fetched her away in time, those nuns would have made her into a Sainte-Nitouche or a *grenouille de bénitier*. Why! I can just see her pausing in the middle of a quadrille to say the Angelus. . . .'

## CHAPTER V

### MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON, DÉBUTANTE

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*Toinette is taken to a fortune-teller. Necromancy in the century. Her new bedroom. Typical furniture and engravings. Her beauty. Delicate health. Her maid Dorine. Importance of soubrette in century. Toinette is received in Madame de Tencin's salon. Madame Poisson apostrophizes her pug. Toinette's lessons in singing, declamation, engraving, dancing. Her accomplishments. Ambition.*

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*'God was missed by these people newly entered in the way of atheism, and His absence left in them an emptiness which nothing succeeded in filling. Then they would try unconsciously to catch Him again and spread out their arms to the world of invisible powers to bring back, if not the dogma they could no longer understand, at least something of the mystery beyond death, for they had to reach the supernatural to shake their mournful indifference.'* (JEAN MOURA and PAUL LOUVET in their essay on Saint-Germain.)

Mademoiselle Antoinette Poisson was speedily cured of her cold, and even sooner of her eagerness to return to Poissy. Life with Mama had become surprisingly pleasant. It had all begun like this: Mama had taken her to a fortune-teller, a Madame Le Bon, who could tell you all you had ever done and see into the future, and this lady had predicted that she, Toinette, would one day be almost a queen! She did not know what that might mean, but it sounded pleasant. It is likely that Madame Poisson, seeing the girl's promise of beauty and charm, and hearing rumours that the young King, now five years married and with several chil-



## MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON

dren, was often seen to yawn and to kill flies on the window-panes of the Queen's quiet boudoir—it is likely that the astute Madame Poisson had decided to bid for high stakes, and had told Madame Le Bon what to say to her girl before the famous interview. There was at that time a lively belief in fortune-tellers, or 'sorceresses', as they were called; great ladies lined up in their sordid antechambers at night, disguised much in the same way as their grandmothers when visiting the witch la Voisin in the reign of Louis XIV. This taste for the macabre led to diverse mummary: at the dowager princesse de Conti's, there was a divining society to which shepherds brought hares possessed of the devil. In the spring of 1752, all Paris was laughing at the misadventure of the marquise de l'Hôpital and Madame de la Forse, who had been told by some Circe that they would see Satan himself if they left a certain sum of money and all the clothes they were wearing in the quarries of Montmartre at night. Alas, shivering with cold, their money gone, Circe vanished, they waited in vain for Satan; at last he appeared in the unpleasant guise of the Commissioner of Police, who, strangely insensible to supernatural explanations, locked them up in jail. In that century of Voltaire, frozen by the limitations of human logic, people sought escape in juggling, intoxication, miracles, ecstatic convulsions, magnetism, sleep-walking, mesmerism and the unhallowed invocation of the shades, when the dead were invited to sup with the living.

Thus armed with the fortune-teller's assurance, Madame Poisson set about providing Toinette with a fit background in which she could be trained for her future role. To begin with she gave her a little room near her own and a personal maid. She threw away her missals and the holy medals the nuns had given her, and she intercepted the correspondence between her and the pious de Blois cousin.

## FURNITURE AND SOCIAL CUSTOM

With the help of many enchanting engravings, the young girl's room—such an important factor in the moulding of her character—can be pictured. Whereas the *Grand Siècle* of Louis XIV had uncomfortable suites of Italian rooms leading into one another, the rooms of the next reign harboured incidents too indiscreet to dispense with the privacy of passages; the occupants were too comfort-loving to live in anything but small, well-heated little boudoirs, suitable for light conversation and amorous intrigue; there were mirrors over the mantelpieces, be-ribboned dressing tables, beds more downy, less ceremonious, a quantity of crystal chandeliers, furniture made of light-coloured woods without the application of bronze, big chests with swelling curves lacquered in the Chinese fashion, and, instead of stuccoes and thick marbles for the walls, new wood panels painted in light tints and framed in narrow lines of gold. There were the marvellous tapestries and carpets of Beauvais, Aubusson, les Gobelins, La Savonnerie; and later Boucher's cherubs twined their rosebud wreaths around the *décor* of these people's lives. This was the century of comfortable chairs and sofas—the *bergère*, the *marquise*, the *fauteuil à poudrer*—armchairs easy to move from one spot to another, with elbow-rests and seats built for ample skirts—in fact, chairs made for intimate and amusing conversations. There was also a regiment of little tables to replace the austere Florentine consoles of the past reign: the *chiffonnière*, dressing table, bedside table, tea-table, work-table, and the charming little desks called *bonheur-du-jour*, with their enamel plaques painted with rosebuds and blue lover's-knots, and their multitude of little drawers—so much more feminine than the huge leather-covered writing tables of Louis XIV. The colours of the damasks were gayer—light pink and egg-shell blue instead of rich crimson and sombre green.

And the pictures on the walls and over the young girl's

## MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON

bed. . . . Did they speak of warding saints and cloistered virtues, those couples interlaced in flowery groves, those scenes mythological, amorous, indiscreet, '*coquines, grivoises*', handed down to us in a multitude of contemporary engravings where nudity takes on an air of *déshabillé*? The laughing little Cupid in Fragonard's engraving '*La Chemise enlevée*' is symbolic of these pictures. One imagines that Madame Poisson would rather choose engravings of the Baudouin or Lavreince type than Moreau's prints, which portray so smilingly the feasts and great events of the hearthside, the married lives and maternal scenes of an age which was much more chaste than one is given to think or ever Madame Poisson dreamed.

And now we skip a few years till we come to the autumn of 1738, one year after Madame Geoffrin had opened her famous *salon*, five years after the King was reputed to have begun his first secret liaison with Madame de Mailly, and the very year in which the separation between himself and the Queen, long a subject of whispered comment and conjecture both in Paris and Versailles, finally became definite, and the exhausted Queen was abandoned for ever.

One afternoon Toinette, now nearly seventeen, was being dressed for her dancing lesson by her maid. At this point, as she emerges from childhood as the finished article, the expensively educated Aspasia, it would not come amiss to paint her portrait. She had a complexion of dazzling whiteness, with rather pale lips which she would bite to make red; wide-arching, clearly pencilled brows, a fit frame for the eyes of undefined colour; magnificent light chestnut hair; a captivating little smile which revealed perfect teeth and ravishing dimples. She was above medium height, with a rounded, beautifully modelled figure, perfect hands, a play of movement in all her body, sometimes passionate, at other times lively, a very mobile face, changing with remarkable anima-

## TOINETTE'S ELEGANCE AND BEAUTY

tion, in which her mind would reveal itself first of all with a noble seriousness and then suddenly with a certain roguishness not devoid of elegance. It is to Leroy, a contemporary, the lieutenant of hunting of the park of Versailles, that we owe a remarkable portrait: 'La marquise de Pompadour was above the average in height, slim, of easy bearing, supple, elegant; her face and figure were well matched; face a perfect oval, beautiful hair, light chestnut rather than fair, eyes fairly large, framed by beautiful eyebrows of the same colour as the hair; the nose perfectly formed, mouth charming, teeth very beautiful; and a most delightful smile, with the most beautiful complexion in the world, gave to all her features the greatest animation. Her eyes had a particular charm which they owed perhaps to the uncertainty of their colour; they had neither the bright sparkle of black eyes, nor the tender languor of blue eyes, nor the finesse which is peculiar to grey eyes; this uncertainty of colour seemed to make them fit for all kinds of bewitching enticement and to express in turn all the impressions of a very changeable spirit; also the play on the countenance of Madame de Pompadour was of infinite variety, yet one never perceived a discordance among the features of her face; all concurred to the same end, which presupposed a mind in full control of itself; her movements accorded with the rest, and the *ensemble* of her person seemed to mark the transition between the last degree of elegance and the first degree of nobility.'

Her very delicacy gave a lovely bloom to her pale colouring which recalled the mother-of-pearl of sea-shells and the rosy heart of the eglantine. Altogether, her mirror reflected an enchanting little person as her maid adjusted a bouquet of flowers on the breast of her bodice and on her blue silk gown, puffed out and foaming with lover's-knots and fine laces. She tapped a fire-log with a minute toe encased in a mule of finest leather. Her hair was drawn straight up from the brow in light

## MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON

waves, moulded to the exquisite form of her head. A suspicion of powder silvered its bronze reflections.

Toinette hummed a little song: 'Par un baiser sur les lèvres d'Iris', as Dorine lightly put a finishing touch here and there to her restless mistress. Dorine was a charming person whose acquaintance no gallant man would delay in making. Like mistress, like maid. At that time, *soubrettes* were fast acquiring a status and importance all their own, and eventually the prince de Conti would dispense altogether with men servants at his musical *thés à l'anglaise*, where pretty little maids would hand the cakes. The traditional Dorine as portrayed by Cochin and Freudeberg had a lace butterfly perched on the top of her head, her arms bare, a large pinafore over her panniers and an Indian fichu over the bosom of her dress, which was cut as low as her mistress's. She trotted about gently with a *frou-frou* of petticoats in a cloud of rice-powder. She had *les yeux fripons et mutins*—the knowing little minx. Dorine had been chosen by Madame Poisson for a purpose. In a room so full of exquisite objects, in which the scent-bottle had been fashioned from a painted egg-shell, anything that was not pretty—*ragoûtant, affriolant*—would have been out of keeping. Mistresses liked to have pretty persons around them: far from being competitive, they enhanced the attractions of the ladies they served. And the *soubrette* knew a dozen trades; she was in turn hairdresser, dressmaker, dresser, embroidress—she became almost a companion and was indispensable in the event of an intrigue. She aped high society by all sorts of mincing airs—for, like ladies' maids to this very day, she was an arrant snob. Sometimes a maid would become so well versed in the art of imitation that, if need be, she could understudy her mistress, as in the pretty story of *Jean et Jeanette*.

'When shall I be allowed to wear a patch, a *telling* patch?' sighed Toinette.

## GOSSIP WITH A MAID

'Oh Mademoiselle, not just yet,' exclaimed the maid. 'It would be most unsuitable for Mademoiselle at her tender age to be seen for instance with a *friponne*. That should be left to . . . Madame de Tencin.'

'Was she as wicked as they make out?'

'Ah, Mademoiselle, we all have our faults. . . .' said the maid, as if the matter were trivial. 'She broke her nun's vows and forsook her child.'

'Yes, her face is very cruel, almost designing,' mused Toinette. 'But I like to go to her *salon*. She is kind to me and gives me advice on Court etiquette which I might find useful one day.'

'Is it true that she and Madame Geoffrin hate one another, Mademoiselle?' asked Dorine curiously.

'They are always together,' laughed the girl, 'and Madame de Tencin says to her intimates: "Do you know why *she* comes? It is to see what she can gather from my succession." '

'But Madame Geoffrin will never found an aristocratic *salon*,' said Dorine.

'Indeed,' said Toinette, a little piqued, 'that is not everything. Some nobles can make one yawn, they are so stupid! I believe in the aristocracy of letters, and though Madame de Tencin's succession may include Fontenelle, Montesquieu and Marivaux, the novels she writes are very dull. Madame Geoffrin may not read any of the books in her shelves, but she certainly has a very stable influence on the conversation.'

Just then, the musical chime of a clock was heard, and exclaiming 'Ah me, I shall be late for my singing lesson,' Toinette fluttered out of the room.

'I wonder what counsel the Tencin gives the girl—nothing good,' said Dorine to herself as she arranged the rouge pots in order on the dressing table. And she shrugged her shoulders and tittered as she recalled Toinette's words about the advice on Court etiquette.

## MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON

At that moment Madame Poisson, with her petticoats tucked up, was warming her legs by a fire in her boudoir and drinking a cup of chocolate. While Tou-Tou, her pug, snored in her lap, she meditated on her daughter's prospects. She had given her the education of a high-class courtesan, because she knew that beauty attracts the male but does not suffice to hold him. The girl's anaemic pallor and weak chest predicted a short blossom time for the senses, and Madame saw to it that the mind was cultivated. Men liked change (she knew it only too well) and the woman who satisfied in her own person this taste for variety fixed his vacillations for ever. It was a pity that no serious suitors with large incomes had appeared as yet, and Madame began to fear it was due to the rumours about her own past indiscretions and the unfortunate and not wholly merited reputation of her husband. La! Well, what could a poor woman do when she had been left in solitude for so long? One had to console oneself as best one could, and stave off the creditors by the sight of rich coaches outside the door. How good that Charles paid so lavishly for the girl's education—her costly singing and harpsichord lessons with Jelyotte, her tuition in declamation with Crébillon, her engraving lessons . . . and then those big bills from Guibaudet. The girl was intelligent and profited by it all. The final polish was received in the *salon* of Madame Tencin, where she acquired knowledge of the world and ease of manner—'So *much* more useful than high principles,' sighed Madame Poisson, looking into a hand mirror and sticking out her tongue to lick and apply on her rather florid cheek a heart-shaped *Enjouée* from her patchbox.

Just then threads of harpsichord music reached her ears, followed by the high notes of Lulli's aria from *Armide* sung by Toinette with admirable taste and precision, though her voice had not much carrying power.

'A plague on my darling's chest,' muttered Madame

## CHATTER WITH A PUG

Poisson, stirring the sugar at the bottom of her cup, 'she mewls like a newborn kitten.'

Her face melted at a pleasant recollection. 'Ah, Madame de Mailly, whom they say is the King's mistress, *did* burst into tears when she heard Toinette sing that tune in the *salon* of Angervilliers; she threw herself into the girl's arms! A fine stupor my damsel was in when she heard afterwards who it was! Though, beshrew me, I wonder what makes that fine dame pule and whimper so . . .' mused Madame Poisson thoughtfully—'Oh,' she said suddenly to Tou-Tou, 'there's hope for us yet, there's hope for us yet! The Mailly will certainly bring news of Toinette to the Court, for they say she is neither malicious nor jealous and allows her sisters to live with her at Versailles. . . . Ah, my little Tou-Tou, we shall live to see you snoring on a cushion of blue silk embroidered with the royal fleur-de-lis in silver thread, and then poor Mama will feel rewarded for all her sacrifices.' And she blew her nose rather loudly.

Toinette had finished her lesson with the amiable Jelyotte. He pirouetted on a high red heel and assured her in flowery terms that she was the choir of the Nine Muses and all the goddesses of Olympus rolled into one. This singer of opera was as much loved in the drawing-rooms as he was in the theatre, and his success, they said, did not stop at applause. A picture by Ollivier shows him many years later, in 1777, singing by the side of the little Mozart during a tea given by the prince de Conti in his suite of rooms in the Temple; a portrait by Louis Tocqué delineates for us the handsome face of this man who had scored innumerable feminine conquests.

Toinette watched the little dandy strut out of the room, then sank exhausted into the pillows of a *bergère*. Deep blue shadows had begun to encircle her eyes. And there was still the elocution lesson with Crébillon, and after that the modiste



## MADemoiselle ANTOINETTE POISSON

was to measure her for some new striped lilac and yellow taffeta bodices. . . . Just then Dorine trotted in with reassuring briskness, followed by the feathery Mouché, a 'King Charles' with many bells on his collar. Dorine carried a tumbler of orange-flower water on a china tray, with which to minister to her mistress's nerves. She made her more comfortable on the *bergère* and then tended the fire-logs. Then mistress and maid awaited the arrival of Monsieur Crébillon, whom they both liked. Though he was independent and unsociable—for he lived modestly in a garret full of animals—he was genuinely fond of his pupil. Whereas her lessons in engraving had given her a sense of line, of 'mesure parfaite, ce tact si fin qui est la pudeur de l'esprit', Crébillon, who was a friend of the house, had formed her young mind to the artifice, the daintiness, the volatile sentiment and gentle irony of contemporary wit. Under him, she perfected the art of telling a story attractively, of reciting a poem.

No! Toinette was no *précieuse*, but a very accomplished young woman—a charming actress, an excellent (though not a tireless) horsewoman, a singer and dancer. In addition she had a most individual taste in dress, glimpsed by the air she would lend to a mere chiffon, the 'signature' grace with which she wore a scrap of frippery; surely she outshone Madame de Mailly, who was reputed to be the most exquisitely gowned woman of her age. 'Indeed,' thought Dorine admiringly as she looked at her, 'she is a *morceau de roi*, a choice titbit.'

Toinette was beginning to acquire quite a little reputation in the *salons*: 'Strange,' said Crébillon to the pet monkey on his shoulder as he hurried under the autumn leaves towards the house, 'strange that she should have slipped into all these exclusive houses; ah, but intelligent charm allied with modesty will open many doors, and she is shrewd enough not to be pretentious, the little puss. Her mother is no asset to her. They say Madame Geoffrin will not receive her. . . .'

## SOCIAL AMBITIONS

'Dorine,' said Toinette suddenly, when she heard the iron knocker announcing Crébillon's arrival, 'when I am Queen, I will give Monsieur Crébillon a pension.'

'Mercy!' cried Dorine, a little taken aback, 'Queen, Mademoiselle? Why, Her Majesty is still very much alive and has already given ten babies to the nation.'

'That is as it may be,' said Toinette in a cold voice, her tiny face becoming hard and set. 'I will be Queen. I know: Madame Le Bon said so. Give me my *fichu*, Dorine, and tell Monsieur Crébillon I am ready to receive him.'

## CHAPTER VI

### THE KING TAKES A BRIDE AND FOUNDS A FAMILY

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*Marie Leczinska sleeps in a Benedictine nunnery. Her appearance. Her childhood. Louis sends a huge escort to meet her. Her silver dress in Strasbourg Cathedral. Scenes on the way. The seas of mud and rain. Duchesses in carts. Wedding day at Fontainebleau. Three hours' toilette, intricate ceremonial. Historian's duty of silence. Honeymoon. Voltaire. Versailles. Christmas Midnight Mass. Her toilet set. Fleury comes between husband and wife. Marie and Louis eat one hundred and eighty oysters. Her twin girls. Frequent pregnancies prevent her from sharing Louis' pleasures. Compared with Marie-Antoinette. Public prayers for a dauphin. Paris rejoicings at his birth. Fleury's rancour. Louis' frivolity and elusiveness.*

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*Sous quelque aspect qu'on l'envisage, ou comme fille ou comme reine, soit comme épouse, soit comme mère, on verra que rien ne manque à sa félicité. (In praise of the Queen by AUBLEL DE MAUBUY, 1773, tome VII, *Vies de Femmes illustres et célèbres de France*.)*

In early September 1725 the Princess Marie Leczinska was spending the night at the cloister of the Benedictine nuns of Provins on her way from Strasbourg to Fontainebleau to marry Louis XV. He was sixteen and a half years old. She herself was twenty-three; not endowed with great beauty, but agreeable withal, well-made, with expressive eyes which now and then shone with kindness and a hint of malicious wit, a large forehead, a nose very slightly tip-tilted, a pretty mouth and a youthful complexion which owed its fresh tints to robust health and cold water rather than to the rouge pot.

Outside her big, musty bedchamber, the autumn night was



MARIE LECZINSKA, WIFE OF LOUIS XV  
From a painting by A. S. Belle in the Musée du Louvre  
*Photograph : Alinari*

## A HANDSOME KING

wild. Marie was quite unafraid. Peals of thunder drowned the monotonous chant of the nuns singing Midnight Office and streaks and slashes of lightning lit up the young woman lying straight and prim in the Louis XIII bed with its heavy curtains. She was so tired that she could not sleep: her imagination conjured up in turn confused images of the King, this dreadful journey and scenes of her childhood. How comely he seemed in the diamond-circled miniature given her the other day by the duc de Mortemart. She was fascinated by the lazy eyelids, the winning glance of the eyes, those palpitating nostrils, that subtle look of elegance, that kingly bearing of the head. How young he looked! In her inexperience the girl did not perceive the effeminacy of the very full red mouth and its pout of boredom, and that the splendour of the glance spelt cruelty as well as majesty. The lids were almost feline. How fluttered the nuns had been when they had seen his picture. They had gone off into excited chirrups and twitters, like a crowd of sparrows, and naïvely compared him with St. Michael—to that Archangel's disadvantage—and with other celestial beings, until Marie had held her sides for laughter.

A medley of events and scenes whirled through her mind—her uneasy childhood, the makeshifts of genteel poverty with its continual strain of erecting a façade before the world, those flights into Sweden and Pomerania with her mother and her father, Stanislas Leczinski, deposed King of Poland. There had been that fearful day when the Russians had broken into the castle of Posen in her parents' absence; she had fled to the care of a peasant and he had hidden her in his oven. This had been followed at last by the protection of Louis' hospitality; and then had come this offer of marriage. Marie had heard that it had been planned by a certain marquise de Prie with Chinese eyes. . . . It was the same marquise who had ruffled her pride the other day by sending her a gift of chemises. She did not like what was whispered of this lady, nor the rumours

## THE KING TAKES A BRIDE

about the ladies-in-waiting she had chosen for her. Her father had counselled great caution and prudence, so she must not voice her fears.

Never would she forget the day when the news of her betrothal arrived at Wissembourg as she was stitching clothes for the poor and her mother was saying her rosary by the fire. Her father had come in, waving the letter in his excitement; he said: 'Ah! my daughter, let us fall on our knees and thank God!' 'What! my Father, have you been called back to the throne?'—'Heaven grants us something even better than that,' said Stanislas: 'you are Queen of France!' And they had all kissed and wept and knelt down to pour out their gratitude to Heaven.

The escort which Louis had sent out to meet Marie and bring her to Fontainebleau consisted of ten royal coaches drawn by eight horses each, and a dozen private coaches drawn by six horses, each of the ladies-in-waiting<sup>1</sup> having her own coach as well as a cart drawn by four horses to carry her bed and her luggage. The carriages which left at the same time from the stables of the Louvre swelled the numbers to about fifty coaches, Berlins, hearses, carts and waggon. They carried the royal dinner services and all the paraphernalia necessary for the feeding and service of the future Queen. The new clothes of the coachmen, postilions, grooms and waggoners, and their numberless carriages caused great amusement to the good people of Paris and to the peasants and townspeople of the provinces. What a great hustle for one little person!

Marie had been quite bewildered when this caravan had reached Strasbourg. On August 15th, feeling like a puppet in a show, she went through the marriage by proxy. She smiled happily into the pillow as she recalled the garlands and flowers of the streets, the majestic cathedral, the eloquent sermon

<sup>1</sup> One of these was the elderly Madame de Mailly, mother of four beautiful daughters.

## A QUEEN AT HER PRAYERS

addressed to her, the pleasure she took in her gown of silver brocade trimmed with silver laces and sprinkled with roses and artificial flowers, the first beautiful gown she had ever possessed. She atoned for her first little outburst of worldliness by praying very devoutly at the Vespers of Our Lady in the Cathedral in the afternoon; she had insisted on attending as it was the great feast of the Assumption. So deep were her orisons for her future spouse that she had to be told several times not to kneel so long.

Then the heart-rending farewell from her beloved father. . . . However, there had been so many things to divert her from her grief—the sight of the blue and silver uniforms outside her carriage, the boom of cannon saluting her entry into each town, the great keys offered on flower-strewn plates, the streets transformed into green porticoes . . . and, on the highway, the peasants of Alsace and Lorraine planting green branches along the road for miles, and coming themselves in their parishes, carrying banners, singing canticles and kneeling down before the Queen to pray for her. All this had moved her very deeply. Tears of pity too had come, as if to vie with the rain which had poured ceaselessly on the marshy roads: she had seen many hungry, piteous faces upturned to her, for the bad harvest had caused much poverty.

‘Yes,’ she whispered to herself, turning in the great bed, while the storm rumbled outside and the nuns chanted, ‘I will relieve the sufferings of the poor.’

Her thoughts flew to her reception at Metz and she recalled the spectacle of the canonesses of the illustrious chapter of Remiremont curtseying before her in their heavy ermine mantles, and then the Jewish community in their strange clothes comparing her journey in flattering terms with the progress of the Queen of Sheba, praising in her the graces of Esther and the magnanimity of Judith. . . . At Rheims, she was presented with enormous hampers of champagne and

## THE KING TAKES A BRIDE

boxes of embroidered and painted satin containing the dried fruits of the district. . . . She was rather relieved that none of the encomiasts had praised her face in detail: in the delicious way she had of being able to laugh at herself, she knew that her mirror did not reflect the lineaments of Venus, though indeed she could have compared her own watery emergence into the Kingdom with Venus arising from the sea, were it not that she did not approve of that lovely lady's nudity. Marie was very modest, as became a Christian Princess; she preferred the people in her pictures to be decently garbed.

*Ciel!* How it rained! The next day, after leaving the nuns, a chapter of accidents ensued: wheels got broken and coaches stuck in the mud of the fields, while everybody became very dirty and very hilarious. Two days before the end of the journey, on the seventeenth night, the rain grew torrential; all the coaches began sinking at once and had to be abandoned. However, the occupants were transported to Montereau before eleven at night. They trickled into the little town, which was eagerly waiting to receive them; the ladies were simply drenched in mud and water: the duchesses, though drier than the rest, were still a little out of temper, as they had been brought in the luggage carts, from which all the silver dishes had been removed; they appeared in full court dress, sitting on straw for cushions. The scene had a touch of burlesque which was not lost on Marie; she was in the highest of spirits, declaring that she would ask some artist to paint the scene for her; and Lancret was suggested.

September the fourth, the day of her first meeting with Louis, dawned bright and clear; the balmy air breathed the softness of early autumn. The rain had suddenly ceased and towards four o'clock a lovely rainbow of happy presage spanned the soft blue sky. The King was waiting on the



## MARIE'S WEDDING GOWN

heights of Froidefontaine. Bands of violins played on all sides, groups of peasants were cheering. . . . Marie had arrayed herself again in her Strasbourg wedding gown of flowered silver brocade. Her heart beat fast as she felt her coach stop. A valet flung open the door and let down the footboard.

When Marie saw Louis all radiant like a lover, standing a little way off, her heart sang for joy; she walked towards him and was about to kneel in greeting when he raised her up very quickly and kissed her several times with such sharp vivacity that her eyes filled with tears. A murmur of admiration ran through the assembled Court. Louis had never before kissed a woman.

The next day, September 5th, her bridal day, she arrived at half-past nine in the morning at her suite of rooms in the Palace of Fontainebleau. Louis was so impatient that he had already visited her very early. The wedding *toilette* took three hours to complete; the putting on of each garment seemed to be weighed down with endless etiquette: the princes and princesses and all titled ladies were privileged to assist. Against her will, two blots of violent rouge were applied to her cheeks: she was told it was usual. She wore a crown of diamonds closed by a double fleur-de-lis, Louis' gift, and a gown of violet velvet bordered with ermine and sown with golden fleur-de-lis and diamonds, and lastly a heavy royal cloak. She found it extremely difficult to move, and walking was almost a feat of strength. At last she was led in a long procession to Louis' room. He was in brocade with a cape of golden Spanish lace; an enormous diamond held up one side of his white-feathered hat. Clasp ing each other's hands, Marie and Louis set out for the chapel by the gallery of François I between a double row of body-guards. The players of trumpets, fifes and drums were followed by the heralds, the knights of the *Saint-Esprit* and innumerable other distinguished personages.

## THE KING TAKES A BRIDE

In the chapel, the high doors were draped with blue velvet embroidered in gold with the arms of France; the benches were covered in purple. Then came the Pontifical Mass, followed by the sermon in which the King was bidden seek his joy in 'an inviolable and tender attachment to the bride fashioned according to God's heart and created to fix his inclinations'. Then came the intricacies of the ceremonial of the nuptial benediction, the taper weighted with twenty gold pieces with its handle made of white satin embroidered in fleur-de-lis, the offering of holy water, the great canopy of silver brocade held over their heads by two bishops during the prayers—symbol of a faithful union under the blessing of the same roof.

Is it surprising that the exhausted Marie fainted for a moment? But she had to reassemble her forces for other endless rites. At the reception she gave away all the little jewels of her *corbeille de mariage*, saying with great simplicity: 'This is the first time in my life that I have been able to make presents.' ('Pauper!' whispered a member of the de Prie clan.) After a play by Molière, and a long supper followed by a tour of the illuminations, the impatience of Louis became visible. But more customs must be observed before he could be left alone with his bride: he had to climb into his bed for a moment during the obligatory ceremonial of the *grand coucher*. At last he was brought to the room where Marie awaited him.

The next morning at ten o'clock, various courtiers of exalted rank and lineage came to pay their compliments to the Queen still in bed. Monsieur le Duc, writing to Stanislas several hours later, reassured him concerning his daughter's conjugal destiny; this he did in terms whose crudity violate the sacred privacy of the nuptial bed, in a manner which even the most scrupulously accurate historian should not imitate: nothing can excuse such unhallowed peering.



LOUIS XV IN HIS CORONATION ROBES  
IN 1730

From a painting by Hyacinthe Rigaud in the Musée de  
Versailles

*Photograph : Giraudon*

## THE QUEEN'S TOILET SET

Then followed the whirlwind of a honeymoon in public: Voltaire, lodging with his patroness the marquise de Prie, was in the seventh heaven because the Queen had wept at a performance of his *Marianne* and laughed at *L'Indiscret* and had called him 'mon pauvre Voltaire'.

Marie had written innocently to her 'cher papa': 'Everybody here draws breath simply for my happiness.' She was too unlearned in the nature of mankind to suspect that the ardour of her young bridegroom might be something other than real affection.

What an enchanted setting for her love was Versailles, where they arrived on the evening of December 1st. They went up to their suites by the renowned *escalier des Ambassadeurs*, brilliantly lit as in the stateliest days of Louis XIV, in all the splendour of its marbles and bronzes, its gilded doors enlivened by the springing fountains under the pompous flower-garlanded frescoes of Le Brun.

On Christmas Eve, the Queen saw her spouse, wearing the insignia of the order of the *Saint-Esprit*, make his Communion in the Chapel before touching the sick to cure the scrofula or 'King's evil'. Seeing him look so noble and so pure, her heart soared aloft on the wings of that Mass music already renowned throughout Europe. And in this apotheosis of the French Monarchy, she offered to God the child whom she now carried within her.

The people of Paris flocked to the galleries of the Louvre to see the magnificent toilet set which the great Germain had made for the Queen. It had one hundred and one pieces of silver gilt—basins, in the form of little ships with a dauphin garlanded by Cupids sitting at the prow, patchboxes on which dainty insects fluttered, boxes for powder, a knife to take away the powder, a basket for gloves, bottles, candlesticks, torches and, as central piece, that high mirror, crowned

## THE KING TAKES A BRIDE

with a double scutcheon with cherubs throwing flowers, upheld by a big bas-relief representing Venus at her *toilette* with the Graces as handmaids.

But all these luxuries could not console the Queen for events which were already causing her secret tears. We learn the reason for her distress from the memoirs of Villars and from the record of her faithful friend the duc de Luynes. King Stanislas had put her on her guard against men who showed any wish to monopolize her confidence; she was to entrust her thoughts solely to the King. It would take too long to recount the intrigues whereby both Monsieur le Duc and the cardinal de Fleury attempted to come between husband and wife and to use the wife as a means of gaining a strong foothold in the King's confidence. In the end Fleury won, but not before he had undermined Louis' intimacy with his wife by making good use of some small imprudence of hers. For many years there followed that extraordinary correspondence between Fleury and Marie, full of a falsely respectful humility on Fleury's side and an affectionate docility on hers. The wife of Louis XIV had been spared contact with these machinating Machiavels and rusing Reynards when Cardinal Mazarin gave up the ghost at the outset of her marriage. But Fleury's hold on the King was so strong as to influence even the private sanctities of the marriage bed.

An amusing interlude occurred when the pair of them, Marie and Louis, fell frantically ill with indigestion after eating no less than one hundred and eighty oysters washed down with four glasses of beer. The prying eyes of the courtiers, sharper than ever during an illness, noticed the passionate anxiety the Queen displayed for her husband, and the striking indifference shown by Louis to her. On August 14th,

## PERPETUAL CHILDBEARING

1727, came the first disappointment of many: the Queen brought into the world two twin Princesses. Luckily the King was both moved and delighted; he had not left the Queen for one instant and when at last the little girls appeared he found a word of Gallic wit on his aptitude for fatherhood. The babies were handed over to their wet-nurses, who were Madame Varanchan of Marseilles and Madame Raymond of Issoire in Auvergne. Ten months later, in July 1728, a third little girl, Madame Troisième, was born. Everybody was miserable at Versailles, but the King took it very well. About that time the Queen wrote, 'Never has mortal loved as I'; the King showed a feverish renewal of his passion; the assembled wiles of all the ladies-in-waiting chosen by Madame de Prie<sup>1</sup> could not shake his constancy. In vain did Mademoiselle de Charolais organize supper parties for him and publicly announce that she would initiate him in adultery. It was evident that the religious training of his youth still held good. (But his admiration for Marie was not on a level with the early days, when the different ladies of the Court were praised in his presence and he replied: 'The Queen is still more beautiful.')

Marie's frequent pregnancies did much to separate them. Her surgeon and doctor, Pérard or Helvétius, whose counsels she had to follow to the letter, often forbade her to share the King's many journeys, so that for a long time before and some time after having her yearly baby, she had to stay at Versailles, while Louis with his usual egoism went hunting. As if to conciliate the rancorous old man she would include many tender references to Louis in her letters to Fleury. Knowing what he was like, one can be quite sure that he conveniently forgot to give any messages like the following: 'I beg you to make him remember sometimes a woman who

<sup>1</sup> She had died in great agony the year before of some terrible and mysterious ill.

## THE KING TAKES A BRIDE

loves him tenderly.' Fleury never left the young man a moment, and in spite of this Marie patiently began her letters to Fleury 'Mon chérissime ami' and would enquire solicitously as to whether he had, in the phrase of the day, 'pris médecine'. She was even obliged to ask Fleury's permission for trifles, such as leave to visit Paris or to take a certain lady-in-waiting with her to Fontainebleau when the solitude of Versailles gave her the vapours. It was Fleury whom she called upon to remonstrate with her ladies-in-waiting for ostentatiously spreading their panniers in the box at the Opéra in such a way that they completely eclipsed her own. It was he who arbitrated at a quarrel at the liturgical washing of the feet on Maundy Thursday, when two court ladies nearly came to blows on a question of precedence at that ceremony, which had been founded as an example of humility.

Unlike Marie-Antoinette her successor, Marie was punctilious in her regard for all the minutiae of etiquette; and yet she had the same simple tastes and love of freedom and intimacy as the spirited little Austrian. But she never satisfied them until she had accomplished all the duties of her state. In this exactitude one senses an instinctive self-defence against all the buckrammed princesses and duchesses, who rather despised the penniless little Polish woman brought to Versailles by a deposed King, the Queen to whom the marquise de Prie had seen fit to give chemises for her trousseau.

When in 1728 Marie again disappointed the nation's hope and gave birth to a fourth daughter, she decided to go to Paris and make public prayers that God would grant her a dauphin. After postponing this, her first appearance in Paris, on account of her great weakness, she entered the city on October 4th; and after various long and exhausting ceremonies on the way she finally prostrated herself in Notre-

## BIRTH OF A DAUPHIN

Dame at the altar of Our Lady in humble prayers for a dauphin.

Thenceforward she took even greater care. She gave up the fashionable sledging around the Canal of Versailles, where all the Court wore fur mantles and high Polish hats, and remained sewing in her own quiet rooms. She was rewarded on the fourth of September of the following year by the birth of a dauphin at twenty minutes to four in the morning. All the princes and princesses of the blood royal, with Fleury and the Chancellor of France, had been waiting around her bed. The babe was anointed with the holy chrism, the blue ribbon of the *Saint-Esprit* was placed around his tiny neck, and he was deposited on a cushion in front of the fire, while the King, radiant with happiness, waited a moment before telling the news to Marie for fear of making her ill with joy.

As there had been no dauphin born for the last sixty-eight years, the good people of Paris, always demonstrative to their beloved Queen, spent themselves in lavish rejoicings. Never before had Paris lit so many candles as on that night. Even in the villages on both banks of the Seine—Vaugirard, Meudon, Chaillot and Suresnes—every poor little hovel tried to muster its taper in the common rejoicing.

To see Marie at that happy time, one should go to the Louvre and look at the portrait by Alexis Belle who shows her, half smiling and with a look of mature fulfilment, holding the very plump little Dauphin, who is wearing a ruched bonnet.

Troubled years followed: in 1773, Marie lost two children in less than two months; she began to tremble for the fragile health of the other babes brought up away from her care, and she longed to replace the second son, the little duc d'Anjou, who had died; but alas, she never did, she was always having girls. At the same time, her filial heart bled at the political



## THE KING TAKES A BRIDE

defeats of her father in his attempts to regain the throne of Poland, reverses secretly abetted by the inextricable tissue of lies and ill will which constituted the Polish diplomacy of the vengeful cardinal de Fleury. He had prevented Louis from helping Stanislas, and it was therefore not surprising that all through that anxious time, before Stanislas finally retired at Lunéville to adopt the fashionable role of 'crowned philosopher', Louis never showed any sympathy for Marie and her father. He seemed less and less able to bring his own opinion to bear in the councils with his ministers. In some strange way he was eluding her more and more; and whereas she had been shy of him before, she was now quite frightened by his coldness. And then, he seemed so idle, so preoccupied with trifles, making confections in his kitchens of the Petits Cabinets, giving little supper parties after hunting, to which she was never invited. Marie wondered whether she had not bored him a little by trying to be too perfect, too submissive. And yet, she did not wish to regain Louis' interest by imitating the outrageous behaviour of such ladies as . . . Mademoiselle de Charolais for instance.



MARIE LECZINSKA AND THE DAUPHIN

From a painting by A. S. Belle in the Musée du Louvre

*Photograph : Alinari*

## CHAPTER VII

### FIRST INFIDELITIES

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*Satan's task. Louis hooked by Platonic friendship. Mademoiselle de Charolais makes him unbend. Drinks to l'Inconnue. Queen's fatalism. Pandering valets. Queen's nervous habits. Louis and champagne. Madame de Mailly his first mistress—poor and proud. Good taste in dress. Louis then loves her sister Vintimille, who dies in a terrible childbed. Louis morbid. Loves another sister—Madame de la Tournelle. Her history. Mailly thrown out. Her despair. Tournelle's cruelty and avarice. Intrigues. Beauty. Ambition.*

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*Ils respirent de suaves parfums, ils se parent de guirlandes et de couronnes; mais du milieu même de la source des plaisirs surgit l'amertume; l'épine déchirante sort des fleurs; le remords crie au fond de leur âme et leur reproche les jours perdus dans l'oisiveté. (Verses of LUCRETIUS to the epicurean youth of Rome.)*

Satan had to prepare the way very cautiously when it came to making a libertine out of Louis, for he was dealing with a very shy, taciturn young man who was afraid of Hell and who had been brought up to shun the sex by a cardinal acquainted with the horrible women of the *Régence*. What was more, Louis kept all the fasts and abstinences of the Church, and these, coming mostly in Lent when the young sap rises in the trees, seem especially instituted to curb the disorders of unregulated passion. Satan, however, found one characteristic to work upon: Louis could be mulishly obstinate and secretive when it came to matters which affected his own pleasure. Then, far from being irresolute as he was in the Council, he became firm and reticent. His courtiers found him 'impénétrable et indéfinissable'. Those beautiful eyes of his

## FIRST INFIDELITIES

with their caressing glance were most deceptive: they hid the soul of a man who was an egoist and a potential libertine, and Satan was only awaiting the advent of a woman for his passions to burst the restraints set by his shyness and his obedience to the Church.

Perhaps those disagreeable old gentlemen who lived as hermits in the deserts of Egypt at the dawn of Christianity were right when they said that woman was the cause of all evil. Louis met few attractive women in the Queen's circle, but he found them in plenty in the suite of rooms on the ground floor owned by the comtesse de Toulouse, a suite which communicated with his own by an interior staircase.

'Nothing definitely wrong in there,' whispered Lord Satan into Louis' ear as he was pacing his library with his hands in his pockets, yawning and occasionally tickling his cat with the tip of a blue brocade shoe. 'Why! Madame de Toulouse holds a little *salon* which used to be a refuge against the brutal gallantry of the *Régence*, and even now the manners and *bon ton* of your great-grandfather's Court still survive there.'

'Yes,' said Louis faintly, 'but she is wedded to a bastard of my great-grandfather's by Madame de Montespan.'

'Really, *mon cher* Louis,' whispered the other, in a confidential tone, 'you are very out of date; why, you talk like one of those pious old ladies that haunt provincial churches. Look, it says in Scripture that it is not good for man to live alone: go and enjoy the legitimate Platonic pleasures of respectable female society: you know you are too frightened of Hell to come to any fault.'

And with that Lucifer went up the chimney with a loud crackle which filled the room with smoke and frightened the cat off his silken cushion. 'The chimneys always smoke here,' said Louis with another yawn.

Just then was announced a certain young gentleman, a son of the fellow who had just gone up the chimney, but officially

## PLATONIC FRIENDSHIP

a courtier and one of a select band whose members were called 'Marmousets'. He was very ill pleased that the sovereign should be like a simpering girl out of a convent and so completely under the thumb of Fleury, his old 'governess'. The creature had already spent half his day in bed; he had rouge on his cheeks and was fluttering a fan. Before long, by dint of clever teasing and respectful mockery, he had persuaded the King to miss a sermon in the chapel and go to a reception of Madame de Toulouse.

This middle-aged lady was a whited sepulchre; her appearance was one of noble and amiable tranquillity, with its 'fine air of sanctimoniousness', as the marquis d'Argenson described it. She was socially ambitious. She had longed for some time to shake this beautiful young monarch out of his apathy and find him at her feet in mute Platonic adoration. (O Plato, all unknowing!) She did not cherish ambition of providing the King with a mistress, as many tongues whispered. Hearing Louis' stentorian yawns, which have reverberated down to us through the pages of more than one biographer, she thought to relieve him occasionally of the soporific society of his excellent but rather tedious wife and make him taste the refined pleasures of her *salon*. Surely this would uplift him; her friends were so far removed from that horrid band of young lords like Richelieu, for instance, who indulged in the grosser pleasures of the senses. And her languishing lids covered her rather hard brown eyes with a secretive droop.

Before long Louis had made himself quite at home with the Toulouse coterie, not only in their lodgings at Versailles but also in their sumptuous château of Rambouillet. He grew to love the hunting in the immense park full of wild animals, the welcome he received, not as from subjects but as from intimate friends whose only care was to make his little visits pleasant. He enjoyed the decorously gay, well-bred conversations in which some of the older lords told him fascinating

## FIRST INFIDELITIES

historical anecdotes, and the excellent dinners. No bawdy jests in that select assembly! Gradually Louis' fear of women began to disappear and he felt more at his ease.

All would have been well had not the comtesse de Toulouse admitted to this charmed circle her intimate friend Mademoiselle de Charolais, to whose youthful indiscretions she had always shut the charitable eye of the woman who wants to be considered advanced and broadminded. She smiled indulgently at her rather risky stories and treated her like a spoilt *gamine* to whom everything was allowed. Anyway, Mademoiselle de Charolais committed her sins in the 'grand manner', and the comtesse, being a snob, overlooked what she would have condemned in a *bourgeoise*. One can see Mademoiselle de Charolais' portrait in the little château of Bagatelle in the Bois de Boulogne, with Voltaire's famous madrigal underneath. Her aristocratic air lent a certain grace to her most daring sallies, tomfooleries, *polissonneries*, a swagger to her most capricious moods and fantasies. Impossible not to notice her: Louis, callow fledgling, was all eyes and ears, for in the whole of his sheltered youth he had never met her like. She amazed and entranced him in turn by her utter disregard for conventions, her disrespectful manner to himself: he was not used to being treated as an equal, like an officer in the mess-room. Someone painted her in a sentence: 'Mademoiselle would have been a receiver of stolen goods, a pickpocket or a flower-girl, had she been born among the common people.' She lived for one thing only, amorous intrigue, and she would have corrupted the King just for the fun of it had it not suited her purpose better to adopt a different plan of action.

It was very convenient for her that the château of Madrid in the Bois de Boulogne adjoined the royal château de la Muette (la Muette). At those supper parties at la Muette where, in the phrase of the times, Comus and Bacchus became the

## EAVESDROPPING VALETS

servitors of the goddess Cytherea, the King's habitual restraint broke down in the heat of his newly acquired taste for champagne and he said strange things. One famous night—they say it was in 1732—at the two tables laid for twelve guests each, everyone was discussing freely the charms and reputations of the women of the Court, when the King, who was slightly tipsy, stood up, lifted his glass and drank a mysterious toast:

‘To the Unknown She.’

He sent an insistent message to the other table to drink the toast as well, and then broke his glass. Immediately there broke out a hubbub of speculation: ‘Who could she be?’ ‘Is it you?’ ‘Alas, no.’ ‘Oh, it must be Madame de Lauraguais!’ and so on. . . . But Louis refused to be drawn.

Alone the marquis d’Argenson, riding on horseback very early in the morning in the Bois de Boulogne, noticed the freshly made mark of coach wheels in the dew, going from Madrid to la Meutte. But even he could not say who ‘she’ was.

After this supper party, eyes grew sharper in peering into the relationships between Louis and the unhappy Marie. Valets, eavesdropping at bedchamber doors, spread the rumours of increasing lack of affection in the interviews between them. Marie had always been intimidated by her husband and now, feeling herself neglected, she gave way to a passive despair with all the fatalism of her Slav nature. Who can blame her? She was not brought up to be a courtesan but a Christian queen. She was neither cunning nor scheming and she disdained to rig herself out with the bait of the rouge pot. (Doubtless she did not know that St. Thomas Aquinas had said it was permissible for a woman to paint her face to recapture the affections of an erring husband. But one would have to know a little scholastic theology to be acquainted with this reassurance.) She fought an unequal contest against many

## FIRST INFIDELITIES

things—against the consent veneered over by sneering pity offered by that Tartufe of a Fleury, against her entourage of ladies, against the strain of a yearly childbed and the fulfilment of a routine of etiquette, against Louis' coldness, against the scruples of her confessor, who showed her the angels guarding the nuptial bed purified by continence, against the veiled mockeries of the courtiers, against her own secret disgust for this desire unaccompanied by love which always led to the birth of yet another daughter. She was too tired to fight ('Eh quoi! toujours coucher, toujours grosse, toujours accoucher,' she had groaned after the birth of one of her daughters.) And lastly, she fought in vain against the influence of a multitude of valets of the bedchamber, avid to become rich by procuring women for their young master and only too eager to make the most of any little hitch in the royal intimacy. Particularly did she fear Bachelier, who was to play so important a part in the whole affair. She disliked intensely this fat, self-important old bachelor, sunk in the morass of egoism, gross good health and prosperity, this Bachelier whose father had been a blacksmith and whose ambition was to rise by being pander to the royal lust.

She gave up the fight, armed herself with patience and prayer and donned the ridiculous bonnets and fussy gewgaws and baubles of a pious provincial lady. She made things worse by giving way to her nerves: despite Louis' protests, she insisted on having a woman by her half the night to try and lull her to sleep with stories, and then, still sleepless, she would get up a thousand times to call for her little dog. Or else she felt shivery in that immense draughty bedroom and insisted on having a feather mattress on top of her, so that Louis was stifled and had to sleep on a couch. Once when he returned very late, reeking of champagne—which she particularly detested—her irritation burst forth and she dismissed him peremptorily from her room. Very soon, Louis, on the pre-



## LOUIS' FIRST MISTRESS

text that it could more easily be warmed, took a separate bed-chamber in the Petits Cabinets and only returned to the nuptial couch at great feasts; for example, at Christmas 1737, after having left the Queen for eight months, he came to spend the nights of the 22nd and 23rd of December with her. Probably the Queen breathed more freely when these liturgical attacks of virtue came to an end. A high-minded biographer of hers says that this was not the case, that she was always longing to replace the little duc d'Anjou whom she had lost. A male biographer cannot understand a woman in that respect.

In the summer of 1738, an unfortunate incident brought her relationship with Louis to a definite close. After a miscarriage brought about by a journey to Montretout on the hillock of Saint-Cloud, her doctor, Pérard, warned her very severely against another pregnancy until an interval had elapsed. She should have told Louis what Pérard had said, but she was frightened, and when the valet Bachelier<sup>1</sup> went to inform her that the King was coming to her room, she replied that she was in despair but she could not receive His Majesty. Louis repeated his demand twice and finally, inflamed by the mock indignation of Bachelier, declared he would never come again. The next day, according to Richelieu, Bachelier, who was conducting a lady to the *petits appartements* of Louis, as if by mistake opened the hood of her mantle and revealed to two ladies the face of his protégée, Madame de Mailly.

It was the wheels of Madame de Mailly's coach which had marked the dew in the Bois de Boulogne and it was Mademoiselle de Charolais who had aided and abetted the whole affair.

Madame de Mailly—formerly Mademoiselle de Nesle—was one of the five notorious daughters of the marquise de Mailly, lady-in-waiting to the Queen. She was rather glad that affairs

<sup>1</sup> One historian has said that Marie refused to admit Louis because she had heard of the Mailly's promiscuity and pretended to fear contagion. This is unlikely, for the Mailly was not too bad a woman.

## FIRST INFIDELITIES

were coming to a head and that she would probably be proclaimed publicly as Louis' mistress, for, according to the moral standards of the time, this would be a guarantee of respectability and spare her many unpleasant humiliations. This unfortunate lady was not only very sensitive to the contemptuous, angry looks of the Queen whom she served, but she writhed in torment under the little venomous shafts of the other ladies, both virtuous and jealous. As she became less respectable, so did her desire to be respected increase. She was not grasping for money and did not care that her chemises were scanty and in holes, that her maid was ill dressed, that she could not pay the smallest of her card debts and that she had to borrow torches for the King's visits, but she refused to be insulted, for she was very proud, 'haute comme les nues', says d'Argenson.

In 1737 Madame de Mailly was twenty-seven, the same age as the King. She had a pair of flashing black eyes set in the thin oval of a brown face; everything was provocative in her appearance, from the brilliant *rouge pourpre* of the cheeks to the thick black line of the eyebrows: she was a real Regency type, with a little of the regal air of a Juno mingled with the effrontery of some Bacchanalian divinity. She made up for any lack of beauty by her exquisite taste in dress, which the other ladies of the Court sought in vain to imitate. This care for the *toilette* accompanied her even to the bedchamber, for she never slept without her hair being twined with all her diamonds. Luynes tells us that it was her 'grande coquetterie' at Choisy to give audience in bed to her merchants, her 'little cats' as she called them, and to gleam like a crystal in the midst of all the rich brocades and jewels spread out before her. She must have inherited this from her de Nesle ancestor, who goes down in history as having astonished the tsar Peter the Great by the variety of his clothes.

Her character was full of contrasts—under the abandon of

## SUPPER PARTIES

a Bacchante, beneath the harsh voice, she hid the tender loving heart of a La Vallière. The King was soon charmed by this strange blend of caressing docility and flaunting gaiety.

What supper parties in the King's private *Cabinets* after hunting, the rare wines, the epicure dishes prepared by Moutier, sometime chef of the duc de Nevers, celebrated in song, the most famous cook of the *Régence*. There was no ceremony at all: Mademoiselle de Charolais, we are told by Luynes, sometimes prepared salads, and the King himself, helped by the prince de Dombes, confectioned *ragoûts* in silver saucepans.

During all this time Louis treated Marie with greater frigidity than ever, and sometimes even with rudeness, as once when he kept her standing in his presence while he negligently went on talking to his mistress. In those early days Marie had not yet learnt to conceal her bitterness; of all Louis' chain of mistresses, she detested the Mailly most for having been the first to steal the King's heart, and on the days that the Mailly was on duty as her lady-in-waiting, her servants all felt the effects of her stifled spleen and despair.

Soon, the inevitable happened. Madame de Mailly's gentleness, her limited feminine outlook, began to get on Louis' nerves by reminding him too much of the Queen, and he began to make much of her sister, the Madame de Vintimille, who had begged so often from her convent of Port-Royal to be allowed to come to Court. One day he had said to Mailly: 'Va-t'en, j'aime ta sœur.' Then followed exasperating scenes of jealousy, sulks, capriciousness; Louis retaliated by comparing her to her sister, to her own disadvantage. The wretched woman began to spy on Louis and mount a guard near his room to prevent any woman going in without her. Very soon she saw that she would be dismissed if she did not resign herself to sharing the King's affection with her sister. This young person had the advantage over her of diverting one so easily

## FIRST INFIDELITIES

bored as Louis; she had the high spirits of a schoolboy, and—new surprise for Louis—she would intimidate him by ridicule. In fact she helped Louis to assert himself against the tyranny of his youth. One day she said: ‘Well, Sire, are you going to tell all that to your *valet-de-chambre*?’ And yet she was not beautiful, far from it! There are terrible testimonies about her long neck, her lanky appearance, her ‘*odeur de singe*’ . . .

Louis had bought, enlarged and furnished Choisy for Madame de Mailly. He took the Vintimille there. Choisy was delightfully situated on the banks of the Seine near the forest of Sénart, at the foot of a hillock between the trees and the water. The interior was well suited to serve as a retreat from the Court etiquette of Marly: it seemed specially designed for the pleasures—so called—of clandestine *amours*. There were passages which allowed one to go from one room to another without passing through a suite, and there were many secret doors. Barbier tells us of the dining-room, the gold and azure, the profusion of mirrors, the good taste and comfort of the whole place. The men guests were allowed to be seated in the King’s presence, and the women, to the great scandal of the old-fashioned duc de Luynes, sometimes walked about in dressing jackets without panniers. Vintimille took possession of her sister’s bedchamber together with the beautiful blue silk counterpane which she had embroidered, thinking it would be hers and the King’s for ever.

In time Vintimille became pregnant, and so ill that her temper was soured. Strangely enough, her petulant irascibility in no way disgusted the King, who surrounded her with all the devoted attention he had withheld from the Queen. On the ninth of September, after the child who was to be the comte de Luc had been born, Vintimille fell so violently ill that the King sent for Silva of Paris and Senac, doctor of St.-Cyr. But too late. All the symptoms of poisoning broke out. Never was there such a death-bed: tortured by atrocious sufferings,

## AGONIZING DEATH BED

gnawed by despair, struggling against the approaches of this terrifying death for which she was quite unready, Vintimille at last called for a confessor. He hurried to the room: in great agony she hiccoughed her soul forth in a last convulsion in his arms, before she could receive Absolution for her sins. And when the confessor came to tell Madame de Mailly, he fell dead himself.

The King was thunderstruck. He choked and sobbed behind the curtains of his bed. He would see nobody; the corpse of the woman whose body he had killed, and whose soul he felt he had sent to eternal perdition, was thrown in an empty coach-house of the palace. Vintimille's face was so contracted with the pangs she had endured that it took the efforts of two men to hold it in place for the making of the death mask. The post-mortem revealed no trace of poison.

As no guard had been set to watch the coach-house, her remains, already fast decaying, were atrociously maltreated by the children and valets of Versailles.

For some time nothing could distract Louis: he would flee sobbing from the supper table of his friends. He would talk of Hell and Death; suddenly he would say he was glad to suffer from an attack of rheumatism in expiation of his sins, and then relapse to frost-bound silence. Madame de Mailly, who bore him no grudge, was there to console him. She became his mistress again. But as it has been said, 'after some time of this *rapprochement*, this association of tearfulness and funereal sensuality', that terrible boredom of which he was a victim dug its talons into him more fiercely than ever, and he sought elsewhere for something to galvanize him. His glance fell on yet another sister of Madame de Mailly, Madame de la Tournelle, a young widow of whom he had said on first seeing her: '*Mon Dieu*, how beautiful she is!' Even in his *amours* he was a creature of habit: those who handled him most

## FIRST INFIDELITIES

successfully always remembered this important trait in his character.

The appearance at Court of this woman who was to become the famous duchesse de Châteauroux was associated with its own piquant legend, which caused her friends a good deal of sniggering. In September 1742, after being widowed for two years and left with very little money to keep up her position in Paris, and then turned out of the house of a dead friend by her enemy Maurepas, who was frightened lest she should do him out of one tittle of the legacy, the duchesse, with her sister, was literally thrown on to the streets, penniless and friendless. They decided to go to Versailles together. When they arrived, while the duchesse went into the palace, her sister Madame de Flavacourt naïvely waited for Providence in her post-chaise in the middle of the courtyard. She had dismissed the porters. Soon the duc de Gesvres came along and, opening the door of the chaise, was dumbfounded to find her inside and asked her how she had got there. When she had told her story, he rushed back to repeat it to the King; Louis found it very waggish and said: 'See that they are given a lodging.' Later, Madame de la Tournelle was made *Dame de Palais* to the Queen, and Louis himself told the news to Madame de Mailly in a voice of ill-concealed malice.

A second martyrdom began for this poor Mailly, who was so wretched a slave of passion: the King became consumed with desire for her beautiful Tournelle sister. She rebuffed him at first, not wishing to be treated like her sister, but planning to secure her position financially. Louis vented the irritation of his thwarted passions on the heart-sick Mailly. Irrked by his chains and too weak to break them, he revenged himself on her by all manner of subtle mental torture. She, in her turn, never stopped weeping. On November 2nd, 1742, he took back her suite next to his Petits Cabinets and ordered her to cede it to Madame de Flavacourt, telling her that she could

## FEMININE TACTICS

take the furniture if she liked. Mailly positively crawled before him and, bereft of any sense of dignity, promised to close her eyes to this liaison; Louis, shaken by the abject humility of her grief and perhaps fearing some public scene, gave her a few days' respite, much to the fury of Madame de la Tournelle.

Several days later Mailly was seen to rush out like a mad woman from the King's room, cheeks drenched in tears, breast heaving. Behind her came Louis, saying: 'On Monday, at Choisy, Madame la Comtesse . . . on Monday, I hope that you will not keep me waiting.' It was on Monday that she had promised to act as a screen to the beginnings of the new affair.

Madame de la Tournelle was supported in all this by the maréchal Richelieu. There exists a letter of hers on how she turned her sister out: it is a monument of feminine callousness, of frigid unconcern, and some of her expressions savour of the fishwife: '. . . the trouble I had to pack off Madame de Mailly, make her "do a bunk"' ('. . . la peine que j'ai eue à faire *déguerpir* Madame de Mailly'). She calls Fleury 'that old rascal'. She meant to put a high price on her surrender and planned to obtain written promises of money and position before giving herself completely: she was not going to have to hire out jewellery like her sister, or suffer the indignities and inconveniences of a clandestine affair. She even pretended to go back to the duc d'Aginois, whom she truly loved, in order to entice the King further. In her stealthy heart lay the shadow of a crushing revenge on Monsieur de Maurepas for the way he had thrown her on to the streets.

So Madame de Mailly was turned out. At the bottom of the staircase at Versailles she found a royal coach to take her to Paris; and even this coach, the King had ordered, was to be returned immediately. Her faithful friend the maréchale de Noailles gave her seven rooms in her house, for otherwise she would have had nowhere to sleep that night, unless she risked a beating from her husband. The unhappy woman lay in bed

## FIRST INFIDELITIES

in the clutches of a heart-rending despair, uttering loud cries for her lover. The curé of Saint-Sulpice could not calm her and they began to fear for her reason. Of a sudden she would sit up, order a carriage to be harnessed to take her back to Court: then she would burst into a paroxysm of weeping and fall back again on her pillows. She implored all her old friends to come and give her their advice. She spent her days and nights reading and re-reading the notes which the King, with consummate cruelty, continued to send her every day. In the manner of rejected women all the world over, she imagined that each banal phrase concealed a loving meaning, when in reality Louis, humiliated by the coldness of the ambitious Madame de la Tournelle, was giving way to a little pang of tearful sentiment at the remembrance of this Mailly who had been so submissive to his will.

The King, consumed by unsatisfied passion, grew thinner and more unwell with each passing day. He flew into high rages when the Cardinal showed him the popular songs which were being written about all this. It was Maurepas who now secretly had recourse to the whistling of his muse. He lashed the favourite in biting couplets, thus teaching the nation to lose respect for the Monarchy. Truly it has been said, 'the ill wind of the Revolution gathered strength in the portfolio of little verses shaken out by a minister'. Madame de la Tournelle with a smile on her lips sang the songs at Choisy, laughing to hide the anger in her heart.

Towards the end of 1742 the favourite showed to the guests at Choisy the King's golden box, forgotten under her pillow.

Now fully launched, she adopted cautious tactics: she pretended to be very little interested in affairs of State, so that Louis appeared to be seeking to confide in her; also she thought it wiser at first that any demands she might make on



## THE BEAUTIFUL DUCHESSE

the Treasury should be very small: this would suit Louis' traditional meanness. With the ministers she was equally subtle, hiding from them the extent of her influence over the King, and flattering them into a false security by pretending, with a show of humble ignorance, to consult their wishes and need their counsel. As for Louis, she kept him dangling in alternations of hot and cold, sometimes making him tremble to lose her in an assumed fit of capricious indifference, at others enchanting him with all the graces of a ravishingly lovely woman. She made him feel honoured that he was permitted to assist at her *toilette* while the Court waited on the other side of a half-open door.

Nattier has painted her in the allegory of the 'Point du Jour'. The dazzling whiteness of her skin, the ravishing glance of her great blue eyes indeed proclaimed the radiance of the dawn—all the memoirs speak of that passionate countenance with its expression of mingled petulance and archness, ardent yet roguish. In vain did Maurepas intercept and show to Louis the letters which Richelieu wrote to her tracing her plan of political conduct. . . . Louis had forgotten how the old Cardinal had brought him up to distrust women, he was in thrall to the beauty of a woman's face; and it was not her beauty alone which captivated him, but the something of nobility which so often survives the crumbling of moral principles. She had a real love for the glory of kingship. Madame de la Tournelle—the duchesse de Châteauroux as she should now be called—was urging him to take an active part in the war, to appear as a national leader, to shake off his lethargy and go forth to merit the nation's love. She may secretly have hoped that the soldiers' songs of Metz would drown the odious couplets of Paris in which her name and that of her royal lover were being dragged in the mud.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TOINETTE MARRIES AND CLIMBS THE SOCIAL LADDER

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*Toinette at twenty. Her contemporaries. She is ignorant of the King's cruelty and hardness. Madame Poisson's views on wedlock. Monsieur d'Étioles proposes. The wedding preparations and ceremony. Toinette calls on Madame Geoffrin. Madame Geoffrin's face, dress, character, house, family, salon. The members of it, artists and philosophers. Diderot on Boucher. Cochin on Nattier. Irreligion. The lady and the corpse. Place of salon in social life. Madame du Deffand's room.*

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*'The words of the wise are heard in silence, more than the cry of a prince among fools.'* (ECCLESIASTES ix. 17. Douay.)

In 1738, seventeen-year-old Mademoiselle Antoinette Poisson was busily acquiring accomplishments. In 1741, when she had reached the age of twenty, she was already accomplished. She lacked nothing but the husband under whose aegis her mother had determined she should ascend the slippery social stair, the narrow way which should culminate in the secret attics of Versailles.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dates are the most interesting part of history. As it is important as well as pleasant to see her against the background of a few of her contemporaries, here are their respective ages in the year 1741, the year Moreau the engraver was born. Mademoiselle de Lespinasse and Fragonard shared the joy of being only 9 years old; Marmontel was 18. Among those who founded *salons*, Madame de Tencin was 56, Madame Geoffrin 42, Madame du Deffand 44. Among the philosophers, Voltaire was 47, Rousseau and Diderot both 29, Montesquieu 52. The dancer La Camargo was 31, the composer Rameau 59, Buffon 34; Toinette's old teacher of elocution, Prosper Crébillon, was 67, Marivaux 53. Among the painters, Watteau had been twenty years buried, Boucher was 38 and increasing in wealth and popularity, Nattier was 56, going a little out of

## THE KING'S IRON HEALTH

In 1741 the Queen of France was thirty-eight and the King thirty-one. Madame de Vintimille had died the year before; Louis was being consoled by Madame de Mailly before starting the liaison with Madame de la Tournelle, which was only to be fully established at the end of the following year. It looked as if Le Bon's prophecy to Toinette was still very far from its fulfilment. Toinette had seen pictures of Louis at that date—the crinkly eyelids, the sensitive nostrils—but she had never heard his voice, that distinguished voice which was always a little husky. Had she known the cruelty concealed behind the velvety blue-black eyes, she might have turned back in dismay. She knew little or nothing of the Queen's silent tears, the Vintimille's tortured end, the Mailly's demented grief and the equally terrible fate reserved for the duchesse de Châteauroux. Louis, that 'monument of human callousness', as he has been called, brought a blight into the lives of all the women he favoured with his so-called love. With her delicate health Toinette might have trembled to hear of the King's almost pathological licentiousness, his robust physical energy. In sport he was untiring. Dufort de Cheverny says that on hunting days he always asked if the horses were tired, never the men. The duc de Croÿ, fourteen years later, saw him galloping on a frozen path at St.-Germain, the very sight of which made you tremble, and he rode three horses in succession for three kilometres each, 'in order to shake himself up'. An iron constitution was needed to share in the King's pastimes alone. It is recorded that four years back, on a Sunday in 1737, he went to La Meutte, where he supped and slept. On the Monday he hunted all day and returned to sup at Versailles. At midnight he took a coach to

fashion and getting hard up, La Tour was 37, J. B. Van Loo (Vanloo) 57, C. Van Loo 36, Chardin 42. In other lands, George II was 58, Horace Walpole 24, Kant 17, Catherine the Great only 12, and not reigning, Frederick the Great 29, the Empress Maria Theresa 24.

## TOINETTE MARRIES AND CLIMBS SOCIAL LADDER

Paris and went masked to the Opéra ball, at which he remained till 4 a.m. He returned towards 6 a.m., heard Mass, dropped into bed for a brief space and got up again to go stag-hunting at eleven. After the hunt he went to the Queen, then to his Petits Cabinets, where he entertained thirty guests to supper, keeping them till daybreak without showing any signs of fatigue or the slightest desire for sleep.

And Toinette imagined that she could be 'Reinette' to such a man, Toinette so frail, like a Dresden shepherdess, with her fainting fits when she ran upstairs, her brittle organism nurtured in the heat of Parisian drawing-rooms.

Madame Poisson was beginning to worry, for the girl had reached the age of twenty and was still unwed. True, she had many adorers; but that was not a business proposition. Marriage with the right man, as Madame knew, gave one a certain something, a kind of immunity from other women's shafts; she did not want Toinette to endure what she had during her husband's long absence in Germany. Wedlock could be the golden key that unlocked the door to society. Maman Poisson was of her century—she would have approved of the tact shown by the husband who, having surprised his wife with her lover, exclaimed: 'What rashness, Madame, had it been another but myself!' Maman Poisson was heartily in accord with the indifference of the comtesse de Maugiron, who wrote to her husband during one of those long absences in which the woman's fidelity underwent such a strain:

I write to you because I have nothing to do. I conclude, because I have nothing to say.

(Signed) SASSENAGE (very peeved at being Maugiron).'

It was important to find a husband who would worship Toinette without, on the other hand, expecting her to adore him; and he must be rich enough to provide her with a suit-

## LOVE IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

able background for her beauty. Charles de Tournehem—dear Charles—as was his wont, came to the rescue and produced his own nephew Monsieur Lenormant d'Étioles, very rich, very ugly, aged twenty-four, and hopelessly in love with Toinette. The signing of the contract was held up for some time by the father of the young man, who flatly refused to allow his son to marry a daughter of such disreputable parents; he yielded only when Uncle Charles, with his customary generosity, offered to make the nephew his heir and, in the meantime, to give the young couple a large income, the château at Étioles, and the use of his house in Paris, for which he would pay the expenses. Who knows but that the humiliation of this first rebuff bit deeply into the girl's pride and did much to unsettle her later when a call was made upon her fidelity? Anyhow, she did not love the young man, though she was perhaps a little *émue* at his ardour. She fanned his flame with the craft of an accomplished coquette, by alternating gentle flirtation with just the right degree of coldness to entice pursuit.

In the reign of Louis XIV, love had been a theoretical passion, a dogma surrounded by an adoration resembling a cult which had its own sacred language of refined idioms; but in the reign of Louis XV, love was desire, love was pleasure. During the seventeenth century little girls of fifteen had stuffed their pockets with books like *Pharamond*, *Cassandre*, *Cléopâtre*, but now they were taught that all that was for simpletons. When a man said 'I love you', he meant 'I desire you'. It was *volupté* which shod woman's foot in a tiny mule, powdered her hair, revealed her gleaming shoulders in a low *décolleté*, tinted her cheeks with carmine; which furnished her boudoir, with its engravings, its soft silks, arrowed Cupids, *lits-de-repos*; which wrote her love songs, and decreed the fashion of receiving at one's morning *toilette*. In this attitude to love, Monsieur d'Étioles was not entirely a man of his

TOINETTE MARRIES AND CLIMBS SOCIAL LADDER  
century, for besides the longing with which he was consumed for Toinette, the unfortunate young man really loved her with all his heart.

At length Toinette fell a slave to a swarm of dressmakers, seamstresses, *lingères*, who kept making saucy jokes and sticking pins into her, while Madame Poisson placed the list of the bridegroom's illustrious guests beside her own and felt a little doubtful whether her relations would compare favourably with them. She sent out very pretty invitations—perhaps like the ones in the Bibliothèque Nationale, graceful trifles garlanded with roses, doves and Cupids. Dorine trotted about in an apotheosis of rice powder, silver slippers, embroidered gloves and *batiste* nightshifts. Mouche the King Charles and Tou-Tou the pug made truce in their mutual love of jumping into the enormous hatboxes brought by the *modistes* and tearing up any ribbons and furbelows they might find there. Papa Poisson, home from Germany at last and reinstated after public enquiry as an honest man, walked about the house rubbing his red hands, getting in Madame's way and ordering cases of liqueurs and *friandises*. Monsieur d'Étioles sighed by night and sent posies by day. Monsieur Charles discreetly went away for a rest cure.

The wedding took place on March 9th, 1741, in the historic little church of St. Eustache where the babies of Louise de La Vallière were baptized and where the Montespan ordered a Black Mass that she might destroy Louise. But such macabre associations were not in Toinette's mind as she stepped into her fairy coach to go to church. Papa was with her, looking as proud as a mouse who'd given birth to a mountain, for all the irksomeness of his tight new knee-breeches, white hose and waistcoat brodered with silken carnations. In those days, the bride's dress was not necessarily white, it might even be blue; in contemporary pictures one can see the bride in a *frou-frou* of petticoats, perhaps in a dress of silver tissue trimmed

## WEDDING FESTIVITIES

with mother-of-pearl and brilliants, very *décolletée*, with patches here and there on the vivid rouge, a tiny coronet of orange blossom perched on her head, and diamond rosettes twinkling on her toes. Nor was the ceremony necessarily in the daytime, for the daughter of Samuel Bernard was married at a Midnight Mass at St. Eustache by the light of six hundred candles.

The family had admired the *corbeille*, or traditional basket filled with a multitude of pretty trinkets, on the eve of the wedding. To-day, the gift was completed after the ceremony by the bridegroom giving a purse in a dainty bag. The bride distributed a fan and a bag to each of the women guests, there were wines and quips and harlequinades and jesting banter of a truly Gallic flavour which Toinette had to pretend not to understand. And at last she is left in her nightcap, like the bride in Baudouin's classic picture 'Le Coucher de la Mariée', very pretty and very sleepy, surrounded by her bevy of *soubrettes*.

The house in Paris which de Tournehem had put at her disposal was near the rue St. Honoré. The first thing that Madame d'Étioles insisted on doing after her wedding was to call on the famous Madame Geoffrin who was a near neighbour and whose famous *salon* had opened in 1737. Unfortunately she could not prevent her mother from coming too. Toinette had met Madame Geoffrin at the *salon* of Madame de Tencin and had become friendly with her daughter Madame de la Ferté-Imbault,<sup>1</sup> nicknamed 'Marquise Carillon'.

This famous visit has been described by Madame de la Ferté-Imbault herself: 'One fine day, to my great annoyance

<sup>1</sup> Nattier painted her portrait in which she wears a domino. She was a devout Catholic, did not share her mother's taste for philosophers, but was so well read in theology that much later she was chosen to help in the education of Madame Elisabeth, sister of Louis XVI and daughter of the Dauphin.

## TOINETTE MARRIES AND CLIMBS SOCIAL LADDER

I saw Madame Poisson and her daughter arriving at my mother's house and mine.' The first welcome was not very warm, for Madame was 'so disreputable that it seemed impossible to follow up this acquaintance'. However, her daughter was charming, with perfect social poise, and 'merited a few courtesies'. How could one separate the mother and the daughter without seeming rude? This delicate problem was shortly to be solved by Madame Poisson falling ill with a terrible cancer and being unable to leave her room.

It is easy to picture the uncomfortable little scene which Madame de la Ferté-Imbault describes. Madame Geoffrin was then forty-two, of *bourgeois* extraction, very ambitious and an awful snob. Diderot once described her clothes in a letter to Mademoiselle Volland: 'I always remark the noble and simple taste of her dress. It was, this day, a plain stuff of dark colour, with large sleeves; the linen was of the smoothest and finest, and then, of the most exquisite freshness.' As for Madame Geoffrin's appearance, we have several portraits: there is one of Chardin, painted in later life, which reveals the thin lips, piercing black eyes, the expression of energy and mild spitefulness; and there are the delightful interiors ordered from Hubert Robert, one of which shows her drinking a cup of chocolate in her bedroom while a manservant, feather duster in hand, reads the *Gazette* to her.

The house, like the woman, fascinated by its cleanliness, its elegance and air of unobtrusive grooming. Her love of order was so great that one day she commanded that a wig be placed on Falconet's bust of Diderot so that it should match the rest of her busts. She possessed many works of art and many books, and the house was richly furnished in the most perfect taste.

What was unique about Madame Geoffrin as the foundress of a *salon* was her own lack of education: she never read the books which her author friends presented to her: but she talked about things so agreeably that she confounded the



## THE SALON OF MADAME GEOFFRIN

pedants, and nobody would have had her more learned. If she made blunders, she quickly retrieved them with a joke. She considered that learning for women was useless. She said: 'I have done so well without it that I have never felt the need of it.' And, indeed, one is inclined to agree with her when one recalls some specimens of feminine learning begotten by Satan in a fit of mirth at the higher education of women. Had Toinette been a little blue-stocking instead of a delightful and accomplished young woman, she would have found the doors of Madame Geoffrin's *salon* even harder to force than they were. For as it was, Madame Geoffrin, noticing that women distracted and broke up the conversation and prevented her from being the centre of unity, never allowed them within her doors. Madame de Lespinasse was the only woman invited in later times to the main gathering. It was to select little supper parties, probably when serious discussion was over, that a few women, the flower of French society, were invited, together with foreign visitors, ambassadors, nobles and men of learning.

Toinette sensed the prickles of the situation and, with her social astuteness, won her hostess's favour by delicate flattery and a gush of politeness which could be quite embarrassing. She begged to be allowed to come sometimes to the *salon* 'to acquire wit and good manners'; she said that her uncle's guests were excellent people, but 'exceedingly bad style'. Who is the woman to resist this persevering semblance of meekness? To Madame de la Ferté-Imbault she would exclaim: 'How lucky you are! You live constantly with that charming duc de Nivernais, that amiable abbé de Bernis and that Gentil-Bernard, and you can get them as often as you like! And I have all the trouble in the world to persuade one of them to come to Uncle Tournehem's, because his company bores them.' She knew that candour often pays, and is better than concealment when it comes to a social position of thorny ambiguity. Madame de la Ferté-Imbault, an excellent person,

TOINETTE MARRIES AND CLIMBS SOCIAL LADDER  
was totally deceived by Toinette, never saw the schemer in her and hotly defended her when her society friends pointed it out: she always called her 'good at bottom'.

The guests at these evenings were very distinguished—some of them the overflow from the *salon* of Madame de Tencin, who used to say to her friends when Madame Geoffrin haunted her *salon*: 'Do you know why she comes? It is to see what people she can filch for a legacy when I am dead.' The philosophers forgathered on Wednesday evenings were very charmed by the pretty manners and the intelligence of Madame d'Étioles. On Mondays the social circle widened, painters came and there was conversation on art. In a corner sat the insignificant Monsieur Geoffrin, so effaced that one day, not having seen him there, a guest asked who he was and where he was and his wife replied: 'Oh yes, that was my husband. He is dead.' Monsieur Geoffrin was so unlearned that he read through two separate works printed in adjacent columns of the same book without being able to distinguish them: he finally admitted that 'the work appeared a little abstract'. His function was to remain silent and to order the provisions for the frugal suppers consisting of an omelette, a chicken, a dish of spinach. The household was completed by a Benedictine, Burigny, who, much to the irritation of some, helped to keep the conversations within certain limits; for Madame Geoffrin practised her religion: she was by nature fearful of excess and revolutionary views. Then there was Fontenelle, at that time eighty-four years of age;<sup>1</sup> a nephew of Corneille, he united in himself the distinction of the last century and the philosophic bent of the present one. He had seen and talked with Madame de Sévigné and had met almost all the distinguished men and women of his century. Like his hostess, he disliked emotion

<sup>1</sup> Old age and ill health did not exclude men and women from social interests—Walpole, ill with the gout, writes: 'It is charming to totter into vogue.'

‘ENGLISH, UGLY, FALSE . . .’

and condemned any exhibition of it. He had never been known to weep, laugh, hurry, be angry or suffer. Even the gentle gaiety of the ‘Marquise Carillon’ was not to his taste. A pure intellectual, if such a monstrosity can exist.

*Madame Geoffrin:* Have you any regard for me?

*Fontenelle:* I find you are very amiable.

*Madame Geoffrin:* But if someone told you I had murdered one of my friends, would you believe it?

*Fontenelle:* I should wait.

Madame Geoffrin tried to model herself on Fontenelle, for he represented her ideal, but it has rightly been said that, as she lacked his elegance, her own manners took on an indifference, an artificiality and unresponsiveness which were foreign to her.

Voltaire did not come to this *salon*—she said his pose of irreligion frightened her. Probably she heard that he ridiculed her pretensions to be a patroness of letters when she could not write two lines correctly, took lessons in handwriting and once shocked Montesquieu by claiming a knowledge of his works which she did not possess. It is noteworthy that, in an age when many women wrote memoirs, Madame Geoffrin never left any record of her impressions save account books, in which she put down lists of the pictures she had ordered from the artists she patronized; for one day there is a most amusing entry about a guest, Mr. Wilkes, ‘English, ugly, false and very extraordinary, who has been much talked of in London.’ Julie de Lespinasse did not come to her *salon* till later, after Toinette’s time. Montesquieu was of her day and so was the young Diderot. He probably argued in a corner with the daughter of the house, who would not agree with him that man was fundamentally good.

The comte de Caylus greatly helped to make the Monday dinners for artists a success. This original, contradictory

## TOINETTE MARRIES AND CLIMBS SOCIAL LADDER

personage, who had become bored with the aristocratic *milieu* into which he had been born, still showed traces of its hereditary prejudices in his attitude to the members of the Wednesday *salon*—the philosophers, men of letters, writers in the *Encyclopédie*. He was an antiquarian and an art connoisseur and his hobby was engraving. Unlike Madame du Deffand, whose doors were shut to artists and who received no men of letters not accepted in the highest society, the comte was only happy in the company of artists—Carle Van Loo, Boucher, gay and talkative, La Tour, the melancholy eccentric with a flair for philanthropy, Hubert Robert, Cochin. It was perhaps a good thing that the men of letters and the artists were kept apart; they might have come to blows and disturbed the peace of Fontenelle and Madame Geoffrin. Boucher would not have relished Diderot's criticism of his art: he called him 'a mere painter of fans with only two colours on his palette—white and red'. Boucher painted 'nothing but patches, rouge, pompons . . . silly gossiping women, satyrs, libertines, little bastards of Bacchus . . .' and had 'the imagination of a man who spends his life with prostitutes of the lowest order'. Toinette cannot have shared this opinion when later she made Boucher her painter in chief and discussed with him everything to do with the decoration of her houses.

As for Nattier, it was probably just as well that he was not an *habitué* of the *salon* and did not hear Cochin's ironical banter about his paintings: Cochin mocked the great quantity of different garments worn by his ladies, and thought their appearance contrary to decency: 'these were apparently the clothes which they wore *en négligé* in their rooms in summer. . . . How was it that all this did not fall to the ground, since it was attached only to the bosom? . . . There were many yards of material and a head-dress of cornstalks, flowers and pearls. . . . They were in the habit of leaning on pots overturned to water their gardens! . . . Evidently they took pleasure in agri-

## THE CORPSE IN THE COFFER

culture. One of their principal pastimes was to amuse animals—they were in the habit of giving eagles white wine in golden goblets.<sup>1</sup>

Small wonder that Toinette was never deeply religious after hearing the views of Diderot—which even Madame Geoffrin's stern 'En voilà assez' could not completely hush. In the *Encyclopédie* he had to take care not to be openly irreligious, for fear of getting into trouble with the authorities, but in a private letter to Domilaville (1766) he was to let himself go: 'The Christian religion is the most absurd and atrocious in its dogmas, the most unintelligible, the most metaphysical, the most intertwined and obscure, and consequently the most subject to divisions, sects, schisms, heresies; the most mischievous for the public tranquillity, the most dangerous to sovereigns by its hierarchic order, its persecutions, its discipline; the most flat, the most dreary, the most Gothic and the most gloomy in its ceremonies; the most puerile and unsociable in its morality. . . .' Toinette lacked the background and early training to refute such opinions.

The influence of Madame Geoffrin on Toinette must not be underestimated. These two women were both full of ruthless good sense. Toinette cannot be said to have possessed a real knowledge of philosophy and art, but simply a slight flair, a taste, an ability to set fashions. Madame Geoffrin was to withdraw her sex both from the state of drunkenness and convulsion in which Regency women like Madame de Prie had taught it to live, and from that furious dilettantism and eccentricity which turned some of the post-Regency women into pretty monsters, like the eighteen-year-old comtesse de Coigny, who studied anatomy and never travelled without taking in the coffer of her carriage a corpse to dissect.

<sup>1</sup> Probably Cochin's ridicule did much to hasten the time when many of Nattier's pictures were dumped in the attics of châteaux to be gnawed by rats; at a sale in 1845, his famous picture of Madame Victoire, daughter of Louis XV, went for the ridiculous sum of 235 francs.

## TOINETTE MARRIES AND CLIMBS SOCIAL LADDER

In a country like England, where conversation has never been an art and where women have rarely had an influence in intellectual affairs, it is difficult to realize the social influence wielded by the *salon*. It was not a place where one acquired much knowledge or even imparted it in tedious dissertations; it was rather a centre where breeding set the tone to thoughts whose seriousness was veiled in frivolity, and where no one person monopolized the conversation. No backbiting was allowed in the best *salons*—that would have destroyed the ‘tone’ and smacked of seriousness. Nothing was discussed for long, but a variety of subjects was lightly touched upon with just the right word for each. Madame Geoffrin was so well balanced and had such a penetration into the characters of her coterie that she knew how to bring out the best gifts of those around her and keep every subject in its right place. The motto over her door was: ‘Rien en relief’.

It has been said that every epoch has a predominating colour and that in this century, in which woman was supreme, it was vanity which showed forth in all things. Why else should Toinette associate with men of intellect?

The président Hénault, a personal friend of the Queen, wrote to Madame du Deffand in the summer of 1742 that he had seen her at a supper party: ‘But I found there one of the prettiest women I had ever seen; it is Madame d’Étioles; she is very musical, she sings with the greatest possible gaiety and taste, she knows a hundred ditties. . . .’

One can imagine Madame du Deffand reading the letter in her room in the convent of the rue St. Dominique, which Cochin has painted for us, with its pretty Angora cats, the fiery-coloured bows of the *moiré* curtains, its wool-basket, books and china cupboard. She would smile a little wryly, and say to herself with the penetration and disillusion of a woman who has tasted every pleasure and found it dust: ‘What is this pushing little person after?’

## CHAPTER IX

### MADAME D'ÉTIOLES BECOMES A MOTHER AND MEETS THE KING

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*Toinette loses her first child. Moreau's engravings of motherhood in late eighteenth century. No feeling for Nature in mid-century. Artificiality of life, thought and language. Effect on woman. Toinette rides to the King's meet. Her garden, nigger, carriage, dressing table. Village scene. Pedlar. Snobbish squire's wife. Gentry of the times. Louis' beauty. Toinette approaches him for first time. Anger of Madame de Châteauroux. Louis likes the bourgeoisie. Sends game. Duchesse drives Toinette away. Amateur theatricals at Étioles. Pamela. Toinette's reputation for beauty and charm reaches Court. Life in country houses. In 1744 Toinette bears a baby girl. Falls ill when she learns of events at Metz.*

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*'If you knock too long at a closed door the Devil may open to you.'*

In 1742 or 1743 Madame d'Étioles had a baby boy who died in infancy. Some of her biographers have realized so little the importance of this sorrow to Toinette, who afterwards proved a surprisingly devoted mother, that they have even neglected to mention it. We may reasonably suppose that the death of her child affected her nature deeply.

Moreau made charming engravings showing the hearthside of the times, 'The Declaration of Pregnancy' and other family scenes. Though they represent a much later decade of the century, when Rousseau was making motherhood fashionable, it is safe to conjecture that they portray Toinette to some extent, behaving in the traditional way of her class. Overjoyed, Monsieur d'Étioles insisted that she should leave the

## MADAME D'ÉTIOLLES BECOMES A MOTHER

feverish delights of Paris and seek the solitude of their country place at Étioles. Here, in a loose dress, supported by little pillows on a downy *bergère*, Madame d'Étiolles, pale and very pretty, would entertain all the devoted admirers she had acquired at Madame Geoffrin's. There the baby's layette, arranged in a satin-lined coffer, was brought for her approval by the *lingère*. Afterwards, when the little creature was born and sent to nurse—a frequent cause of losing babies—she would lie in the *chaise-longue* with one of those frilled foot-covers which were the chief vanity of women in convalescence. On the fourteenth day, she would go to be churched, and afterwards she *might* sometimes visit the village where the baby was being nursed. Indeed, had she insisted on performing this most felicitous of maternal rites, a shower of ridicule would have fallen on her from all sides.

After the baby's death, it is not difficult to imagine her tormented restlessness: in an age when excessive grief was deemed unpolished, her bitter thwarting must needs find vent in unnatural gaiety. During a century when the very gardens were artificial, when the terraces resembled amphitheatres and the flower-beds were copies of the Aubusson carpets in the drawing-rooms, woman must not break the general harmony by being simple. The subtle minutiae of deportment and speech became fine arts to be practised daily before one's mirror—that negligent smile, that lip-biting, those affected mincings and simperings, those *airs mutins*, that delicious way of blinking as one sipped tea, of placing a patch, of clicking a fan to express anger and tapping with it as if to say: 'Now, now, that will do.'

In proportion, woman's language became etherealized, brimming with the meaningless verbiage of ecstasy and exclamation. 'Astonishing, miraculous, divine!' At the smallest fatigue, one was 'annihilated' or 'prostrate', at the tiniest reverse one was 'in despair', 'suffocated'; if a man hap-



## NERVES OF WOMAN UPSET

pened to lack charm one called him 'a man fit to throw out of the window', and if he pleased one loved him 'beyond measure', or one was 'mad to the pitch of renouncing food and drink'. The voice took on all kinds of affected modulations and lisps, one said 'mon pizon' instead of 'mon pigeon', and so on.

All this was an echo of the revolution in woman's moral being: she judged life by two standards, that of boredom or that of enjoyment. She renounced all womanly feelings in order to acquire a worldly wisdom which saw human life solely as a rite, the end of which was amusement. The century saw in woman, delivered from the servitude of marriage and the care of the family, a being whose whole duty was to symbolize the image of pleasure in society and to offer it to all her fellow creatures. It had not happened to the same extent before. In the Middle Ages woman was more of a housewife, with the care of a great household and many children; during the sixteenth century she took to humanistic studies; during the grave seventeenth century, with its religious upheavals, she was absorbed in the still-room and the oratory. But, in the eighteenth, the *bourgeoise* suddenly found herself surrounded by a multitude of servants (one-fifth of the population was in domestic service), seduced by the example of a frivolous Court, with few children, and nothing to do but enjoy herself.

And enjoy herself she did. Monsieur d'Étioles, longing only to distract Toinette and bring a little colour into those pale cheeks, gave her a blue phaeton with pink reins which she could guide herself; she ordered blue and pink dresses from her modiste, and she decided, one fine morning in spring, to follow the royal hunt in the neighbouring forest of Sénart.

One morning in May, the groom drove the azure phaeton painted with pink flowers to the bottom of the high flight of steps leading into the château d'Étioles. It seemed like some

## MADAME D'ÉTIOLLES BECOMES A MOTHER

fairy vehicle, poised for a flight among the downy clouds which now and again flitted across the sun and cast feathery shadows on the box-edged paths. The little turrets of the château sparkled; in the flower-beds the dew scintillated on the spear-like iris leaves, the royal fleur-de-lis, the red cornets of the frilled and striped tulips, the peonies like nests of pink fledglings and the evil spotted fritillaries. In the background loomed chestnut-trees, and nearer the long French windows stood tubs of orange-trees in full bloom, newly released from their moist winter seclusion in the orangery. Among the flower-beds were still some grotesque relics of seventeenth-century gardening when box had been clipped to the shapes of dogs holding palm-leaves, bizarre dolphins and vases.

In the distance, from the village with the thin spire surmounted by a golden cock, the faint sound of a hunting horn and the baying of hounds could be heard. The horses pawed the sand, whinnied and shook the bells on their ears. Just then the great door of the château was opened by two flunkies in blue and purple velvet: Madame d'Étiolles stepped forth, followed by a turbaned nigger page-boy holding a coral parasol on the end of a long stick, and Dorine the maid carrying a basket of pink gardenias. Toinette paused and looked with pleasure at the tiny carriage with its ridiculously high wheels. She herself was dressed in voluminous coral-pink taffeta skirts with a little ruched coatee which fitted her very closely and flared below the waist. She had a small *tricorne* poised provocatively over the left eye and carried a whip made of blue ribbon mounted on an enamel handle. She rustled down in a balm of fraxinella; her panniers filled the carriage and the maid had some trouble in finding room for the basket of gardenias in the back, with the nigger boy.

Dorine was a little jaded, having spent two hours making up her mistress among a litter of swansdown puffs, powder

## TOINETTE PURSUES THE KING

bellows, powder masks, scraping knives, crystal scent bottles and the numberless pots coloured in delicate egg-shell tints which contained Madame's eye shadow and lip salves; but she did not fail to make the right remark.

'*Bonne journée*, Madame,' she cried. 'I hope Madame will catch a glimpse of His Majesty.'

'Thank you, Dorine,' said Toinette, smiling with her lips alone, 'and do not forget to fill my bath when I return, for I shall be fatigued.' And with that she was gone.

When she was out of sight, Dorine turned with a titter to the groom. He drew a piece of heliotrope from the pocket of his yellow and black striped waistcoat and stuck it into his mouth.

'Buy this with a kiss,' he said.

When the King and his Court went hunting in the royal forest of Sénart, people flocked from all around and the village wore a festive look. The farmers' wives came out in their black hoods, straw hats, and gold crosses on their bodices, and the beggar-women of the highway, carrying their shoes at their waist, forgot their resentment against the cruel poaching and preserving laws in their eagerness to see the King. The roads were cluttered up by hucksters' donkeys smothered under their loads of utensils, milk-women carrying tin pots on their heads, urchins selling nuts by the bushel. The peasant costumes near Paris were not so gay as in the provinces because the proximity of the richly dressed Court was discouraging, but the peasants themselves were as jovial as ever, as English travellers in France always remarked. The inn-keeper, standing alone at his door, resembled a figure in comic opera with his waistcoat of painted flowers. Toinette had to slow down as she made her way through all this crowd; occasionally she was stopped by a marionette player, a juggler, or a pedlar who tried to sell her some of his medley of rosaries,

## MADAME D'ÉTIOLÈS BECOMES A MOTHER

ear-picks, copies of the *Petit Chrétien* or the *Chemin du Ciel*, mirrors, gold rings and crosses.

'Hi, you there,' said a voice to the pedlar, 'can't you see that the dame does not want a copy of the 'Path to Heaven'? And a guffaw of laughter greeted the joke while Toinette went pink with indignation and forced a way through by whipping up her horses to a trot.

At length she was out of the village and driving along the road past the old manor house in which lived an ancient country family: they would never call on her because she was of the rich middle classes—the despised *bourgeoisie financière*. She hoped she would not meet them. But as luck would have it, there they were, setting out to the meet in a dilapidated barouche of Louis XIV's reign. She hurried in order to pass them before they started: she could not help catching a glimpse of their malevolent looks out of the corner of her eye, or hearing the adder-hiss as she went by. There was the marquise, getting on in years and very stingy, dressed in the fashion of the *ancien régime*, with her high Fontanges head-dress, quite out of date, her *rouge de Portugal* and, *Ciel!* the brilliants on her patches! Toinette told herself that she looked like a *précieuse* who had cackled in her day in the boudoirs of the Maintenon, and she giggled when she remembered Dorine's account of this lady taking with her to church, as a safeguard during the long sermons of monsieur le curé, a tiny *bourdalou* of Saxe porcelain. 'Panniers have their uses,' she reflected. She pricked out her rosy skirts a little more. She had soon forgotten the local gentry with their pretentious snobbery, their poverty, their dwelling on faded glories and their pathetic attempts to copy the gowns and rooms of Versailles. Just then she caught sight of an avenue of yews trimmed to the forms of obelisks and vases, and smiled at the efforts of the marquis to rival his King's long parallel avenues. How much better, she thought, if they looked after the houses on

## SNOBISH GENTRY AND A PICNIC

their estates—she had passed two or three dark straw-covered hovels with hams and garlic hanging from the blackened beams and little pigs frisking and scuttling in from the mud outside. She could see into one of the dwellings now, for there were no panes in the window: she caught a glimpse of the rough picture of the Sacred Heart nailed to the wall, and the gleam of the copper pan for making pancakes at Candlemas lighting up the dark interior. A smell of grilled lard assailed her nostrils and she held a kerchief to her nose. A woman was throwing old acorns to her favourite pig murmuring 'Pauvre Goret.' 'Holà, good mother,' cried Toinette in her fresh voice, 'can you tell me down which alley of the wood the royal hunt has gone?'

The woman looked up sullenly and said, 'In the first lane yonder.' She went on feeding her pig.

At length, after turning into the wood and driving down a wide mossy path, fluttering with rabbits, without catching sight of anybody, Toinette and her nigger boy espied in the distance a wide clearing in which the royal party was having a picnic. Hunting horns and knives were hung up on the branches of oaks, a huntsman was holding the hounds in leash and two little scullions in white were carrying aloft large platters of boars' heads with lemons stuck in their jaws, roast hares and an abundance of crystallized fruits, *andouilles à la pistache*, *pyramides d'Égypte* (which consisted of minced veal and ham richly spiced), golden capons from Le Mans, and meringues in silver dishes.

Under the copper beeches the plumed mules were shaking their tin ear-pieces. Courtiers with the blue *Saint-Esprit* ribbon slung across their breasts were bending down solicitously and talking gallantly to various ladies, one of whom, the duchesse de Châteauroux, was pushing a greyhound with the tip of a violet morocco shoe: she was brilliantly beautiful, in a huge feathered hat and crimson velvet riding dress, but she

## MADAME D'ÉTIOLLES BECOMES A MOTHER

looked ill and unhappy with her white face and the great circles under her eyes. Toinette pulled in her reins, seized with sudden panic—dare she do what she had so often planned—ride past the King and try to attract his attention? Her heart beat violently. She turned round to her nigger and told him sharply to hold the parasol a little higher. Then she peered with her quizzing glass to make sure where the King was seated: there he was, teasing a spaniel. How he yawned! She saw the duchesse glance up at him uneasily. He had not said a word. He was dressed in purple velvet with large galloons, delicate lace ruffles at throat and wrist, powdered wig and a hat-brim bordered with tiny white ostrich feathers. For the first time, Toinette saw what Casanova in his memoirs called 'the finest head in the world', carried with 'great dignity and grace. No painter, however skilful, has succeeded in rendering the expression of that splendid head when the Monarch turned to look kindly at anyone.' And this is precisely what he did at that instant, for Toinette in a burst of impetuous enthusiasm galloped right up to the clearing, slowed down when she reached him, bobbed and smiled at him, and then rode away into the glade beyond to the sound of a subdued murmur of admiration on all sides. Louis got an enchanting glimpse of fresh girlish loveliness heightened by all the devices of coquetry and fashion, a fleeting cloud of azure and rose made piquant by the coral of the gardenias and the dusky skin of the nigger. . . and then she was gone.

When the commotion had died down again, Louis asked who she was.

'Oh, just a little commoner from Paris who has risen through marrying riches. She lives quite near, at Étioles,' said the duchesse de Chevreuse, who was a friend of the Queen's.

'See that some boars' heads are sent to her,' said Louis to the chief huntsman. 'A very pretty little lady.'

## THE DUCHESS SHOWS HER CLAWS

‘What, to a little upstart snit from Paris?’ sneered the duchesse de Châteauroux.

‘Ah, Madame,’ replied Louis, ‘you have no idea how charming they can be, those snits.’ And he smiled a little as he recollected the stories he had heard through the gossip of his valets and his visits to masked balls in Paris. ‘Yes,’ he thought, ‘those low-born subjects of mine are worthy of a little attention; they would make excellent mistresses, for they would not be avid and ambitious, and if you tired of them you could discard them easily enough without causing an uproar among their relatives. Also, a liaison with a *bourgeoise* would create less scandal with the people as she would be unknown at Court, and one could stuff her away in a convenient little attic. Cheaper, too, and no danger of political meddling. . . .’

On the return journey, in the coach, the duchesse de Châteauroux sat between the King and the duchesse de Chevreuse. Suddenly the latter exclaimed: ‘How pretty that little Madame d’Étioles was looking to-day.’ She was just going to repeat what the président Hénault had told her about this lady’s accomplishments, when suddenly her foot was violently crushed under the cruel heel of the duchesse de Châteauroux. And as her toes were very tender from wearing high heels, she felt faint with the pain. This caused a diversion during which she had to be given some *gouttes d’Hoffmann*, and Madame d’Étioles was forgotten for the moment.

The next day, the duchesse de Châteauroux came to visit the duchesse de Chevreuse to make her excuses for having hurt her, and as she was going, she said in a voice of studied carelessness: ‘Don’t you know that everyone is talking of giving *la petite Étioles* to the King—that they are merely waiting for an opportunity?’

The duchesse de Châteauroux then commanded one of her own lackeys to follow Madame d’Étioles when she next came to the forest and, before she had time to get anywhere

## MADAME D'ÉTIOLLES BECOMES A MOTHER

near the King, to order her off as rudely and as coarsely as he could.

Toinette was too frightened to appear again, in spite of the gifts which came pouring in from the King, all in due season—the hampers of venison, deer's antlers, wolf-heads and foxes' brushes, the heads of wild boars, pheasants of gorgeous plumage and plump grouse. She said nothing of her little reverse. The gifts consoled her wounded pride and lent a certain *cachet* to her hospitality. Voltaire, Fontenelle and Crébillon, as they feasted on the royal venison, teased her for having provoked these assiduities, and she deceived them and her excellent husband by saying laughingly before them all: 'Only his Majesty could make me forget my duties to Monsieur d'Étiolles.'

The summer passed quickly enough. The gatherings at Étiolles combined the intimacy of a family circle with the witty conversation of a Paris *salon*. Talleyrand has said: 'Who has not lived in the eighteenth century does not know the sweetness of living.' And indeed entertaining in the country houses had a gay informality, a special charm all of its own. It was the vogue to read aloud a translation of Richardson's *Pamela*, and the président de Rocheret would turn to his young hostess and call her 'beautiful, lily-white, gentle, my Pamela'. Uncle Tournèhem with his usual generosity had a stage built—for amateur theatricals were the rage in the country houses—and Toinette showed off her talents to perfection. He was very proud to display her. There was constant communication between the Court and Étiolles by means of the nobles who went there, probably attracted by the lavishness and lack of ceremony of Tournèhem's hospitality; they brought back all the latest gossip about this lovely young woman who was such a good actress. Like their King, they found the chronicles of the French *bourgeoisie* a topic for continual chatter.

According to the fascinating memoirs and letters of the



## TOINETTE HAS A SECOND BABY

time, life in a country château was merely a continuation of the Parisian social whirl. They were blind to the beauties of Nature, these people, and not for several decades would Marie-Antoinette start the expensive vogue for 'simple' rustic pleasures. You pined for the arrival of the *Gazette de Paris*, you played cards until cock-crow and then visited your fellow guests in turn in order to go on gossiping. If the guests were left alone for one moment, they would fall into 'nothingness', that awful *ennui* which seems to be the special malady of an exquisite civilization.

In the late autumn of 1743 Toinette became pregnant again. In July 1744 she was awaiting the birth of her baby in the following month when she received terrible news: the King had fallen violently ill at Metz and was expected to die. When later she heard that he had confessed his sins and begged the Queen's forgiveness, she fell seriously ill herself and her life was in danger.

## CHAPTER X

### THE DREADFUL EVENTS OF METZ

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*Louis urged to go to war through the intrigues of Madame de Châteauroux. Popularity with soldiers. She joins him at Metz. Anger of mob. He falls ill. Calls for priest. She is sent away. Queen comes. Intrigues to make her seem ridiculous. Fury of duchesse. Watches Louis hidden in crowd. Louis returns to her. Terrible illness and sudden death of duchesse. Talk of poison. Queen's nightmares. Repentance of Madame de Mailly. Unpleasant devout women.*

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*'An ecclesiastic who was preaching before Louis XIV happened to say during his discourse, "We are all born to die." Then, remembering himself, the poor man turned in the direction of his Monarch and, humbly bowing, added: "Nearly all."'*

A chain of extraordinary events had led to Louis' illness when he was at Metz at the head of his army. How was it that a King so idle, so bored, so occupied in trifles, had been sufficiently roused to go camping out; to acquire popularity by braving the elements, visiting the wounded and tasting the soldiers' soup? Madame de Châteauroux had achieved that. By the influence of Richelieu, who in turn was pushed by the intriguing Madame de Tencin, the proud duchesse had been inspired to drag Louis from the infinity of sordid nothings which surrounded him, and make him the glorious star of his people. She wanted him to realize his privilege as leader of a great nation. She began plaguing him about affairs of State, the ministers, the army and Parliament, till one day he said:

'You are killing me!'

## CLANDESTINE AMOURS

'All the better, Sire,' she replied. 'A King will rise from the ashes!'

Who knows how far she was moved by a desire to drown the poisonous couplets of Maurepas with the *Te Deum* sung in Notre Dame?

Thus, on May 2nd, 1744, the King set off for Flanders, leaving the duchesse behind and also, alas, the Queen, who, when she had asked to accompany him, had been told that it would be too expensive. So she remained behind in tears and without any pin-money to follow him on her own account. Wherever he went, Louis was greeted by outbursts of enthusiasm. He was immensely popular. Everyone noticed his extraordinary gaiety, his *camaraderie* with his officers, the personal interest he seemed to take in the provisions for his soldiers (which gave one to hope that profiteers would be stamped out), and above all the middle classes and the rank and file observed that 'there were no women about'.

But this was too good to last more than a month. Gradually the young officers were heard singing in their tents:

*Ah! Madame Enroux  
Je deviendrai fou*

. . . . .

Madame de Châteauroux had left Versailles on July 6th and had arrived followed by many other ladies. She was not in the best of health and, in fact, at Rheims had been so ill that the King had spoken of her burial ground; but she was as lovely as ever. When she was better, they arrived at Metz where they proceeded to flaunt their liaison: a wooden gallery, built with much hammering between the *appartement* of the King and the favourite's suite in the Abbey of St. Arnould, and the fact that four streets were suddenly closed to the public, proclaimed the tidings more loudly than any songs.

Of a sudden, after a night's carousal and many toasts drunk

## THE DREADFUL EVENTS OF METZ

to the King of Prussia his ally, Louis fell ill. From the 4th to the 12th of August, in spite of the traditional blood-letting and purging, his symptoms grew worse, and on the 12th his life was pronounced to be in danger. The duchesse began to tremble lest the priests who were hovering by should pounce, frighten the King into repentance and have her ignominiously thrown out, into the clutches of the angry mob. She gave strict orders that no priest was to be admitted to Louis' bedside: she risked her lover's perdition to save her own skin.

In the meantime, the nation was in a great turmoil. At the sacristy of Notre-Dame alone there were six thousand requests for Masses to be said for his recovery. Voltaire's account in *Le Siècle de Louis XV* must be quoted: 'The news of the King's danger reached Paris in the middle of the night. The inhabitants rose from their beds and ran about in their excitement, without knowing whither they went. The churches were opened, although it was midnight; nor did people any longer pay regard to the hours of sleeping, waking or taking their meals. All Paris seemed to have gone mad, and the houses of persons of high position were surrounded by crowds. The public squares were also thronged with people who kept crying out: "If he dies it will be for having marched to our relief." Even strangers who met in the churches accosted and questioned one another on a subject in which everyone was so deeply interested. In many churches the priests who read prayers for the King's recovery were forced to pause through emotion, the people responding with sobs and cries.'

At Metz, growing more and more anxious for her own safety and terrified by the King's delirious fear of the flames of Hell, the favourite held council with Richelieu and decided to try and bargain with Père Pérusseau, the King's confessor. An amazing interview took place behind the King's bed, in a tiny closet of which Richelieu guarded the door. How

## DUCHESSE AND PRIEST

embarrassed and puzzled the good priest must have been at first, when he was assailed by this vixen, assuring him in a flood of rhetoric that she would be the first to urge the King to confess for the sake of appearances, but desired that an exception be made concerning her dismissal, for the reason that Louis was a King. He took refuge in equivocal answers and finally, seeing the drift of her manœuvres, resorted to silence. Then Richelieu entered the field of action and jumped on the priest's neck and pressed his hand, while the duchesse, adopting the languishing airs and clinging gestures of a Mary Magdalene, caressed him and tearfully promised that she too would repent and confess and that from henceforth she would only return to Court as the King's friend.

That night, as she sat watching Louis, he fainted away and became pale and motionless: they all thought he was dead; suddenly he sat up and cried in a loud voice: 'My broth, my broth! . . . and Père Pérusseu! Quick, Père Pérusseu!' The duchesse was doomed. A covey of bishops and priests fluttered in from all sides and pushed her out of the room; she stood outside, trembling with rage and humiliation. After a short time the folding doors opened and she heard the priest's voice thundering: 'Ladies, the King commands you to leave his house at once.' This was Fitz-James, Bishop of Soissons. (Son of a natural son of James II by Arabella Churchill, he had become a churchman later in life and thus was unseasoned and inclined to rigid Jansenism.) He gave orders that the Sacred Host solemnly exposed on the altars was not to leave the churches till the duchesse de Châteauroux and her sister were out of the town.

They found a ruffianish crowd waiting outside. Richelieu saw to it that they were given a travelling carriage and an escort of musketeers. For fear of the mob, the armorial bearings on the doors were removed hastily, the blinds pulled down, the musketeers dressed in plain clothes. The ladies

## THE DREADFUL EVENTS OF METZ

slipped in, heavily cloaked. Nevertheless, they were seen leaving the town and were followed by stones and curses.

A conscience eased of guilt combined with an emetic administered by a retired army surgeon brought Louis back to health with startling and almost dangerous celerity. On August 19th, it was said, 'the city of Paris for many hours was nothing but a vast enclosure full of madmen'. The courier from Metz had his boots kissed as if he were an archangel when he galloped in with the news: 'The King has recovered.' The different companies of artisans ordered a *Te Deum*; every single window—from mansion to hovel—was illuminated. A street poet called Vadé who was the ballad-monger of the fishwives gave Louis the title of 'Well-Beloved', which clung to him so long. When Louis heard it, he had the grace to exclaim: 'What have I done to deserve it?' Never had French King been so idolized; the threatening rumble of Revolutionary thunder seemed very far distant during that year of 1744.

Alas, a fatal mistake had been made—if anybody but the King was to blame. His confessor, less concerned with his salvation than in showing forth the omnipotence of the clergy, exposed Louis to the nation in a most humiliating light. It was the doing of Fitz-James, aristocratic, ambitious and proud, more suited to warfare than to charity: he had the King's words of repentance transcribed and distributed throughout the Kingdom to be read by all parish priests in the pulpits. The judicious Barbier writes in his *Journal*: 'One must respect the reputation of a King and, though one must let him die with religion, it must also be with dignity and with majesty.' It was folly to expose the King's private life to the poisonous clucking of a thousand little tongues; and Louis bore the clergy a grudge ever after.

In August, in the midst of these events, Toinette gave birth to her little daughter Alexandrine, and a strange thing

### THREE UNHAPPY WOMEN

happened when she heard of the King's repentance: she had a '*révolution de couches*' and for a time her life was despaired of. It looked indeed as if that ambitious folly which she had fostered for so long was gradually taking on the semblance of love.

In the meantime, the carriage with drawn blinds galloping towards Paris passed the Queen's coach hurrying towards Metz. In despair at being separated from Louis—for she still loved him in spite of disillusion—Marie had borrowed money for her journey from Orry the Comptroller-General and was driving to her husband with breathless speed: so preoccupied was she that it probably did not occur to her that she was going back on the very same road she had travelled as a young woman nearly twenty years ago, on her marriage journey to Fontainebleau. When she reached Metz, Louis had a slight relapse and implored her pardon for all the wrongs he had done her. Looking on that face which sin had never coarsened and which illness had refined, Marie was moved to forget; she forgave him everything.

All might have ended well had it not been for Richelieu,<sup>1</sup> the boon companion of all Louis' youthful escapades. Richelieu knew that if Louis reformed in earnest it would be an end to his own influence and the good old times. He feared another petticoat dynasty with Marie playing the role of Maintenon.

To see the mischief he wrought, one must allow a curious old Court record of the duchesse de Brancas to speak for itself:

'The older members of the Court persuaded themselves easily that God, after having struck the King, would melt his

<sup>1</sup> This French Don Juan left after his death a positive museum of unopened letters from society women who were shamelessly imploring for assignments.

## THE DREADFUL EVENTS OF METZ

heart. The lady-in-waiting was so devoutly persuaded of this that one day, finding the King in a fit state to give to the Queen positive proofs of a sincere reconciliation, she ordered that the Queen's bed be changed into a nuptial couch and had two pillows put on the bolster. You can see what high hopes were entertained, by the joy of some and the astonishment of others. Since the King's convalescence the Queen had been beautifully dressed in rosy-coloured gowns. The old ladies announced their hopes by green ribbons; in short, it was a long time since the finery of the *toilette* had been so ingenious; in throwing out hints without giving anything away, it recalled the gallantry of olden times. But you can equally well imagine the joy which the duc de Bouillon and the duc de Richelieu took in speaking to the King of the pleasure which was being prepared for him in the Queen's palace. He appeared so annoyed about it that these gentlemen thought it would not displease him when they warned the old church cronies that they were wrong to prepare a *Te Deum* which they would never sing, and that nothing was more uncertain than the King's conversion. That was enough to make the ladies change their *toilette*. Some took to more modest colours, others lowered their head-dresses or put on less rouge.'

How dreadful is that lack of privacy from which royal personages suffer!

Meanwhile, stopping a moment at Sainte-Menoult on the way back, the duchesse, ill with exhaustion and rage, wrote to Richelieu (the letter can be seen in the library of Rouen):

'... ah, my God, what is all this, I give you my word that now all is finished for me, one would be a great madwoman to desire to re-embark on it....'

As she proceeded on her journey, the stones and hissings continued so persistently that she was obliged to get out and hide up a side road before she came to each town or village



## CONJUGAL FRIGIDITY

and wait there for the coach to come back and fetch her when they had got new relays. At last she slipped into Paris unnoticed, the drone of abuse still echoing in her ears. She rushed into her house in the narrow rue du Bac near the Jacobins of the rue St. Dominique, and had to remain hidden there for fear of the fishwives and common people. She fell ill with nervous convulsions. First she would sob and then hold up her head proudly, and a bitter smile twisted her face into that ironical mask which conceals the deepest wounds of pride. She clung desperately to life and to hopes of revenge. On September 13th she wrote to Richelieu:

‘ . . . for myself I will really try to acquire the health of a street-porter to rile my enemies as long as I possibly can and to have time to cause their downfall. . . . ’

The relations between Louis and Marie had relapsed into their normal coldness. He could not forgive her for being there in place of the duchesse, so he treated her cruelly. She wept in secret. Hiding their painful thoughts, they had to put up a façade for the benefit of the people of Paris in the tumult of national thanksgiving.

Compelled by passion, the duchesse dragged herself out of bed and hid disguised among the crowd to watch Louis as he went in procession to the Hôtel de Ville. She describes this in a poignant letter:

‘ . . . Far from wanting to make conditions for my return by the dismissal of certain people, I feel weak enough to give myself at a simple request of the master. But tell me, I beg you: do you think he loves me still? . . . I dressed myself in such a way as to defy recognition and, with Mademoiselle Hébert, I stood in his path, I saw him, he looked joyful and moved, he is then capable of a tender impulse! I fixed him with my eyes for a long time, and, see what imagination is, I thought he had cast his eyes on me and that he was trying to

## THE DREADFUL EVENTS OF METZ

make out who I was. . . . A single voice, coming from near me, recalled me to my grief by naming me in a very offensive manner. . . . I believe that sooner or later some disaster will befall me. I have forebodings which I cannot dismiss.'

On the night of Friday, November 14th, practically the last night of the festivities, the King stole out silently from the Tuileries and went to the rue du Bac to see the duchesse: she felt extremely ill, her brain was in a fever, but she tried to hold him with a last flicker of that fire which is always brightest before it crumbles to ashes. All she could say was 'How they have treated us!' It was the very way she had ill used her own sister, Madame de Mailly.

Richelieu had caused Louis to be profoundly disenchanted by making out that all the devout men who had pressed around his death-bed with attitudes of devotion were secretly consumed by ambition. Perhaps that is why he laughed heartily when he saw the Jesuits of the rue St. Antoine getting soaked in the heavy November rain as they stood outside the church and complimented him on his recovery. For, from that time, he could never bear to have an ecclesiastic interfering in affairs of State, or even sitting at his table.

The Queen had no more illusions for her own happiness. One night at the Tuileries, says the duc de Luynes, the women of the bedchamber came three times to tell the Queen that someone had knocked softly at the door, and three times she told them it was only the wind. She knew better than to trust their credulous imaginings.

The King returned to Versailles. He had not yielded to the duchesse's pleadings to dismiss the hated Maurepas, but had humiliated him by making him bear the letter which officially recalled the duchesse to Court. Maurepas left Versailles at noon, and at four, the hour ordained by the King, he pre-

## TERRIBLE DEATH AGONY

sented himself at the rue du Bac. He paused uncomfortably at the door, his ugly swollen lids hiding his shifty eyes. The duchesse was in bed with a temperature. She savoured his embarrassment for some moments and then said: 'Give me the King's letters and *get out.*'

Her triumph had come too late. She became delirious, she had convulsions and shrieked aloud, and then had sudden attacks of devotion which disarmed and touched Père Segaud, her confessor. Then she would curse Maurepas, whom she accused of poisoning her by means of the letter. She was bled eleven times and still the agonized fury of her mind would not abate. Her friends served her devotedly. Madame de Mailly was not admitted: she wandered like a soul in torment, outside the door, and nobody troubled about her. Suddenly, at five in the morning of December 8th, 1744, the shrieking ceased. Madame de Mailly was admitted three hours later, to kneel beside the corpse of yet another sister who had tortured her and who had also died a violent death. Would that her own hour might be soon, she breathed. It was the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin. Since her girlhood the duchesse had prayed to die on a feast of Our Lady.

Two days later, on the Thursday, Madame de Châteauroux was buried an hour before the usual time in the chapel of St. Michael in St. Sulpice, surrounded by an armed watch to safeguard the coffin from the fury of the people.

After her death, there was much talk of poison, those subtle dusts of the Renaissance that might have been slipped into the King's letter. Everyone was asking what Maurepas had been doing in Paris during the long interval between receiving the letter from Louis and bringing it to the duchesse. To all this, Vernage the physician shrugged his shoulders. She had been upset after the terrors of Metz; the subsequent reconciliation with its salving of wounded pride, followed by plans for revenge and amorous indiscretions, at a critical time, had

## THE DREADFUL EVENTS OF METZ

brought about a putrid fever or cerebral congestion. The post-mortem confirmed the verdict of Vernage. Her sudden and desperate affliction took on more than ever the semblance of divine punishment.

The Queen's friends say that Marie had prayed for the duchesse who had been so insolent to her. After hearing the news, Marie refused to accept any invitations lest she seem indifferent to the King's grief. That same night she could not sleep, for she was full of fear. She called one of her women and said:

'My God, that poor duchesse! If she came back! I think I see her.'

To which the woman replied with cheerful good sense: 'Eh Madame! If she returned your Majesty would not be the one to receive her first visit.'

Some time after, Marie noticed a hole in her bedchamber door cut out by a knife, and realized that the duchesse had spied on her intimacy with Louis like the lowest of menials.

Of the three sisters possessed by the King, Madame de Mailly alone remained alive. If ever she had cherished the hope of being loved again, she had soon been disappointed, even before her sister's death, by the cruel letters which Louis wrote to her. One day, profoundly moved by a sermon of Père Renaud, a pupil of Massillon who had all the Provençal's ardent love for God, she had decided, in the manner of the day, to announce her retirement from the world by discarding rouge and patches. On Maundy Thursday of the year 1743 the Court thronged to the grey sisters of Saint-Roch to see her humbly washing the feet of the poor. It was almost a public expiation. The rest of her days she spent in visiting prisoners and the poor, reserving out of her meagre pittance only the bare necessities and sometimes not even that. Louis had not paid off her creditors properly. One day, going into

## THE MAILLY REPENTS

the church of Saint-Roch a little late for Mass and being obliged to disturb some people to reach her seat, one of those devout souls—who would snub the great Mary Magdalene herself if ever they were allowed to put the ends of their long noses into Paradise—one of those excellent persons said aloud: ‘Here is a lot of commotion for a drab!’ Madame de Mailly replied gently, ‘As you seem to know her, commend her soul to God.’ She quenched the ardours of her heart in the raptures of divine Love and came to forget all she had suffered.

In 1751 she died. She was found to be wearing a hair shirt. By her own express wish, she was buried among the paupers in the cemetery of the Innocents, under the drippings of a gutter-spout.

*And now my heart is as a broken fount,  
Wherein tear-drippings stagnate, spilt down ever  
From the dank thoughts that shiver. . . .*

But from the gashes of that heart broke forth the incense of peace.

PART II

REALIZATION

## CHAPTER XI

### TOINETTE IS PRESENTED AT COURT

1745

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*Famous fancy-dress ball at Versailles for Dauphin's wedding. King disguised as yew-tree. Cruel hoaxing of Madame Portail. Mixed rabble. Toinette comes dressed as Diana. Excites Louis' curiosity. He meets her at ball of Hôtel de Ville. She entices him with subtlety. Bishop Boyer threatens to dismiss Binet if he brings Toinette to Court. Louis roused by opposition. Toinette visits Versailles. Affects disinterested love. Husband's despair. Battle of Fontenoy. Toinette at Étioles with Voltaire and Bernis. Their looks and characters. Unwelcome guests snubbed. Poems. Toinette created marquise de Pompadour. Given old lodging of duchesse de Châteauroux. Gets rid of her portrait. Madame de Genlis on ceremonial of presentation curtesy. Toinette is presented at Versailles. Queen's sweetness. Dauphin sticks out his tongue.*

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*'He that diggeth a pit shall fall into it: and he that breaketh a hedge, a serpent shall bite him.'* (ECCLESIASTES x. 8. Douay.)

As we have seen, Louis was treacherous in friendship, cruel, false, idle, stingy in money matters, a man endowed with great physical vigour and yet intellectually weak, bored, a burden to himself and others; he had already caused the utter misery of four women, and the death of two of them; he had now lost much of his popularity by returning to the duchesse in November, and the fishwives who had prayed for his recovery said in their crude language: 'As he has gone back to his concubine, he will not find another paternoster on the streets of Paris.' Yet this was the man whose fancy Toinette sought to capture.

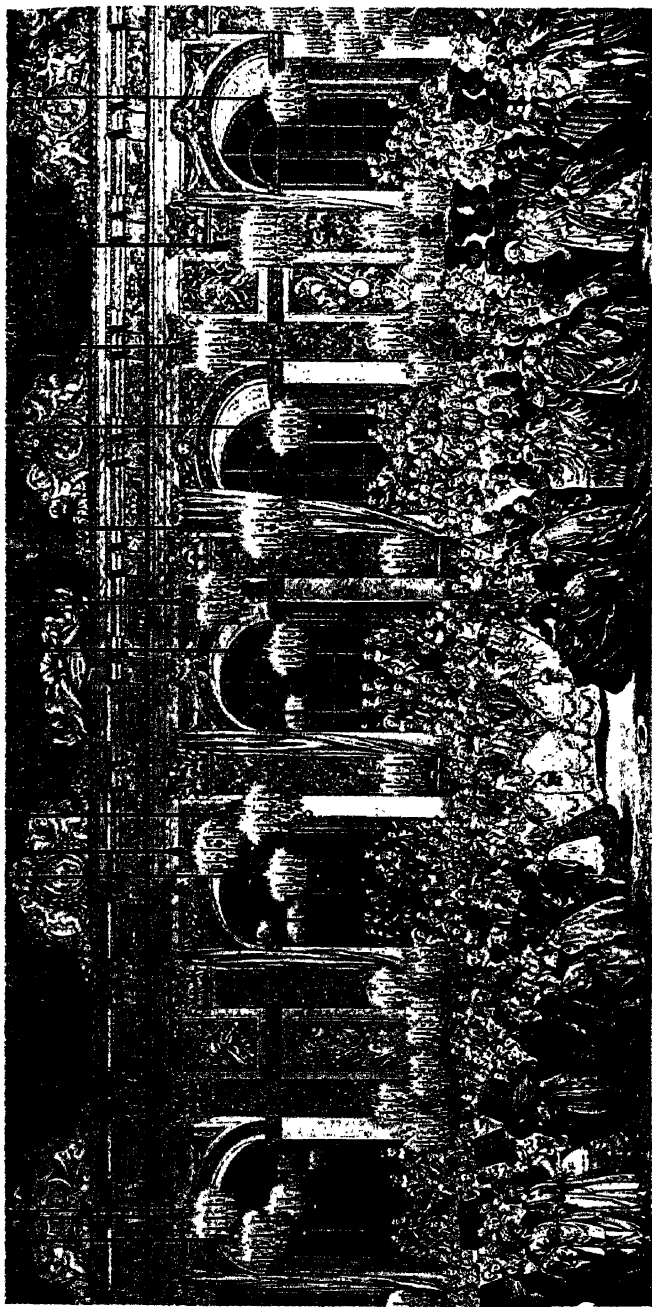
## TOINETTE IS PRESENTED AT COURT

Her baby girl Alexandrine was six months old when she heard, in the year following the duchesse's death, that there was to be a masked ball at Versailles on the twenty-fifth of February to celebrate the marriage of the Dauphin. It was easy for the middle classes to obtain an entrée to these functions; all they had to do was to come well-dressed and get one member of their party to lift his mask for a moment and give his name at the door. A very precious and charming engraving of Cochin shows us the ball-room crammed with Harlequins and Pierrots, Scaramouches, Persians in long robes, Turks in turbans, Indians, wizards, shepherdesses, nymphs, goddesses—in fact, all the inhabitants of Olympus, the theatre and the Orient, a medley of bizarre forms and colours, chattering and laughing in a tremendous press. One can almost hear the notes of music soaring like golden bees from the harps, flutes and violins of the orchestra, or see over it all the great white statues in the hall of mirrors, like brooding spirits contemplating from their solemn height the follies of that multitude. The palace was lit up at all the windows on the side of the courtyard. The masked ball started at midnight. All the *bourgeoises* whose consciences, husbands or mirrors had not kept them at home were driving along the straight road from Paris, many of them intent on catching the roving glance of their handsome monarch. And Toinette was among them, perturbingly attractive in a cherry-coloured domino. We know of Louis' disguise from a mysterious madrigal found in Voltaire's papers.

*The yew-tree to-day is my glittering star,  
And of late I esteem it more worthy by far  
Than the laurels all gary of Mars god of war  
Or the myrtles of Cythera glimpsed from afar.*

What was the appearance of this 'yew' that yet again uncorks the mellifluous nectar of Voltaire's sycophantic muse? If





LE BAL DES IFS DONNÉ DANS LA GALERIE DES GLACES  
DU CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES, LE 25 FÉVRIER, 1745

From a painting by N. Cochin

*Photograph : Giraudon*

## FIRST MEETING OF THE LOVERS

Cochin's engraving is carefully examined, there can be seen a group of men in a corner disguised in the green leafage of clipped yews, and the King was among them. This accounts for a scandalous story which was the rage of Paris for several days: when Madame la présidente Portail, famous for her bold amorousness, espied the group of dark forms that looked like gardens walking into the château, she threw herself at the neck of the one she knew to be the King. He responded to her impudence and at length bade her follow him to a dark little lodging which belonged to the first valet of the King's bed-chamber. Flushed with mingled triumph and surprise, already secretly planning a glorious future for herself, she accepted vague promises in exchange for the substantial realities she lavished. . . . Soon after, she returned to the ball-room: imagine her fury when the first person she met coming towards her was the King without a mask. Her deceiver vanished in a chuckle of laughter: in a few moments, the scandalous tale was being whispered in every ear.

Toinette was jostled among the great throng of people. She was a little disappointed to see so many women of her own kind instead of Court ladies, among the women sitting on the tiered benches, lifting their masks to taste the delicious collations offered by the pages; she noticed a strange little scene between the haughty princesse de Conti—with whom she was one day to be well acquainted—and some rather ill-bred *bourgeois* man who, not recognizing her, had taken her seat. She exclaimed angrily: 'Apparently the company here is *very mixed!*'

Louis was lost in enjoyment, perhaps for the first time since the death of the duchesse. He wandered in and out of the crowd, relishing the bold glances of the succulent dames and damsels of Paris. Gradually he became aware that a very exquisite young Diana—masked—had slipped the snood of her cherry-coloured domino and was aiming at his heart with

## TOINETTE IS PRESENTED AT COURT

a jewelled bow and arrow. Her tiny feet were sandalled in silver, there were iridescent cords twined across her breast and over her minute quiver. From under diaphanous draperies looped kirtle-wise with silver she pointed a foot as finely chiselled as that of loveliest marble nymph in palace walk. But she, matching the statues in perfection of poised gesture and modelling, surpassed them all by her delicate carnation tints and the burnished gold of her curls. The crescent moon, symbol of the 'goddess chaste and fair', sparkled on her forehead. Louis stopped for a moment and, clasping his hands on his heart, said:

'Beauteous Diana, your darts are mortal.'

She laughed. Surely, she was some woodland divinity strayed from her alabaster pedestal in the stately walks. In the echoes of remembrance he sought to recall why she made him dream of forest glades, of Sénart. . . . He said in his deep voice:

'Raise your mask, fair huntress, for but a moment, else I die.'

A crowd had gathered to watch this encounter. The young enchantress shrouded her gleaming shoulders in her domino and was just slipping away with another ripple of mirth when suddenly she turned round, lifted her mask for a moment and showed the face of the lady who had jingled past him at the royal hunt of Sénart in a flutter of blue carriage and pink panniers under a parasol held up by the little nigger. It must be that Madame d'Étioles to whom he had sent game and hunting trophies. . . . A murmur from the crowd: 'The kerchief is thrown!' Louis bent down to pick up a fragile trifle of scented gossamer and press it to his heart with a masquerade of passion. But Toinette had already vanished.

Contrary to her expectations, Toinette did not create a unique impression on Louis: that same night, he made assignations with several ladies for the masked ball at the

## TOINETTE WEAVES HER WEB

Hôtel de Ville, to be held on February 28th, a few days later.

The *Journal de Barbier* tells us that this was even more crowded than the ball at Versailles. The organizers had lost their heads: too many tickets had been sold by servants; improper females pushed and clawed their way in and generally added to the pandemonium; the scrum on the staircase was so thick that one could neither go up nor down. Women shrieked and fainted away. The refreshments had already given out hours ago. Everyone thought the King would be there incognito. So he was, and disguised in a black domino; but he decided to leave Versailles when the Dauphin returned in order to avoid being with him at the ball. The worst of being a father so young was that he did not always feel in the mood for setting a good example to his son. Their coaches crossed half-way. When Louis reached Paris he dismissed his coach; he and his familiar friends all piled themselves up into a common cab, laughing and jesting like schoolboys on an escapade. When they reached the Hôtel de Ville he found that one of the girls whom he had arranged to meet had been prudently kept at home by her parents. His friends went to threaten the parents while he promptly forgot the girl and sought diversion elsewhere. A young colonel records in his memoirs that he saw the King and Pompadour and that she was 'in a black domino, in great disorder'. They had a meeting in the provost's private room. Then they left in the company of the duc d'Ayen. She did not go to Versailles that night, as the colonel affirms. To give herself before making any conditions would have been the action of a very sensuous or very naïve woman; and Toinette had been trained to craft. They all got into the cab. Where could he take her to?—To her mother's, was the reply. She would not allow herself to be casually plucked like any common workgirl, but assumed a modesty which she knew would make her more desirable. In

## TOINETTE IS PRESENTED AT COURT

the cab Louis appeared young and gay: the sad wraiths of Mesdames de Mailly, de Vintimille and de Châteauroux were far from his side in that February dawn.

Suddenly their cab was held up in the street. Louis, fearful of being seen by the police, told the duc to bribe the man with money—a small coin which would not arouse suspicion. The coachman whipped up his nag and rattled through the crowd; very soon, Madame d'Étioles was left at her mother's house as befitted a well brought-up young lady. Louis got back to Versailles at half past eight in the morning. He put on his coat and heard Mass. Then he gave orders that he was not to be wakened till five in the evening. The Queen went to his official *lever*, while her coaches waited at the entrance to take her to Benediction at the parish church. Toinette, exhausted by the excitement, slept until nightfall.

The next day in the intimacy of his bedchamber Louis confided in Binet, his son's valet, telling him how bored he was and how amusing he found the ladies of Paris. Binet ventured to suggest that his cousin by marriage might divert his Majesty. What was her name? 'Madame d'Étioles, Sire.' 'Oh yes,' replied Louis with a vast yawn, 'I think I brought her home last night. . . . Pretty little piece—la! Tried to shoot me with an arrow at some ball. Binet, kill that fly on the window-pane.'

Probably Louis would not have given another moment's thought to his passing flirtation with Madame d'Étioles had not Boyer, Bishop of Mirepoix ('sour, opaque creature' as Carlyle calls him) interfered in his affairs. Being crossed in his designs always confirmed Louis in obstinacy. Learning that Toinette was a friend of that Voltaire who had once ridiculed him, Boyer told the Dauphin of his father's behaviour and he in his turn forbade his wife to accept Louis' invitation to see the curios in his *petits appartements*. Boyer also collared Binet,



LOUIS XV IN THE PRIME OF LIFE  
From a pastel study by Maurice Quentin de La Tour in  
the Musée St. Quentin  
*Photograph : Bulloz*

## AVARICE AND AMBITION

who was the first valet of the Dauphin's bedchamber, and threatened to make the Dauphin dismiss him if he continued to further the interests of his kinswoman. Binet played the part of offended virtue, swore he had never so much as heard of this Madame d'Étioles, and then rushed off to repeat every word to the King's friends.

These gentlemen, knowing that their day would be over when the devout party, playing on the King's fear of Hell, got a hold at Court, reported all this to Louis and made him feel that he might look ridiculous if he did not take a firm line. Also, they said that Boyer was sowing disunion in his family circle in the name of religion. So with the best intentions the Bishop played into the enemy's hands; Louis, still smarting from Metz, mulishly ordered Binet to bring Toinette to Court.

After an interview, Louis told Binet that he was going to drop her for a little, for he had detected signs of ambition and avarice, and he wanted to see the effect of his indifference. Binet said that Madame could not be wanting money, as she came from an extremely wealthy family. Then he rushed off secretly and warned Toinette to be more cautious and pretend not to care for anything but the King's person. This she did so cleverly that on March 29th the duc de Luynes writes that there was a mystery as to where the King supped one night. Two days after that she was seen at a *ballet comique* of Rameau's performed on the stage of the riding school at Versailles. She had no right to be there with the Court ladies. And on April 1st she made fools of them all, this little Parisian daughter of a runaway thief and a *demi-mondaine*, by appearing at a performance of the *Comédie Italienne* in the château itself, where seats were even more difficult to get, in a box in full view of the King and Queen. 'She was well dressed and very pretty,' says Luynes.

Louis did not perform his Easter duties that year. He first showed off his favourite to his intimates in the Petits Cabinets

## TOINETTE IS PRESENTED AT COURT

on Thursday April 22nd. Louis' hunting friends were there; Richelieu too, with the effluvia of the duchesse's tomb still in his nostrils. Luynes says they never went to bed till five o'clock in the morning. (Later, the duc de Croÿ will introduce us to one of these suppers.) Luynes continues: 'One does not know precisely where she stays, but I think it is in the little *appartement* which belonged to Madame de Mailly and which adjoins the Petits Cabinets. She does not stay here all the time; she comes and goes from Paris, returning [to Paris] at night.'

Monsieur d'Étioles had been tactfully spirited away by Uncle Tournehem for the Easter holidays. When he returned to find the bird flown, Uncle Tournehem broke the news and he fainted away. Then he showed such violent despair that all weapons in the house had to be carefully hidden.

This was very opportune to Toinette's design, her determination not to be the victim of ephemeral passion. With all the skill of the consummate actress, she played the part of the wife terrified of her jealous husband. She appealed to the King's gentlemanly feelings and begged for protection, for change of name and *estate*. Very embarrassed, Louis told her to come and stay at Versailles. The wretched Monsieur d'Étioles wrote to her there imploring her to return to him. As she wanted to show Louis how adored she was, she read the letter aloud with jesting mimicry and, to her great discomfort, there followed a pause, during which the King, perhaps recalling the silent weeping of those he had himself forsaken, said drily: 'Madame, your husband is a very upright fellow.'

This coldness was fleeting. With all her training, the advantages of intelligence and youth, and a beauty which the fashions of the age enhanced a thousandfold, she had caught Louis fast in the little web she had spun for so long and with such cunning; by April 27th Luynes wrote: 'They say she is



## LOVE LETTERS

head over heels in love with the King and that this passion is mutual.'

On May 6th the King and the Dauphin went to the war again, to fight that extremely operatic little battle of Fontenoy against 'Messieurs les Anglais'. Louis had no decent pretext to take Toinette, so he told her to go into seclusion on her country estate at Étioles and just entertain a few selected friends. He promised that, when he returned, she should be properly established. Toinette saw him go with regret, mingled with a certain feeling of relief, for she was exhausted with scheming and late nights; her digestion was so deranged that she had to go on a milk-diet.

It was with a sigh of restful pleasure that she lay back in a downy *bergère* under the chestnut-trees in the Étioles gardens. She resembled a bouquet of lilies of the valley in her white tulle jacket looped with green lovers' knots. Dorine was near to tend her, there were her two friends the abbé de Bernis and Voltaire to write little poems to her, and occasionally Monsieur de Gontaut came to explain all the intricacies of Court etiquette. It speaks well for Pompadour that she made friends with this Monsieur de Gontaut of high birth and serious character who had a fine career as a soldier. He initiated her into the traditions of a world that was quite closed to her—the different customs, speech, manners, the marriages and genealogies which should be known, the allusions which must be recognized. . . .

Twice a day the courier with his spurs flashing in the sun would gallop up the avenue which was aflame with wall-flowers. He came to bring the King's love letters marked with his own device, 'Discret et fidèle.'

Dorine brought a bottle of Tokay on a large silver platter and poured out glasses for the guests. Voltaire's body was beginning to wither and wizen to the crackle of his restless

## TOINETTE IS PRESENTED AT COURT

spirit. Bernis was poor and proud, very plump and rosy, a devoted friend, too aristocratic to be a climber, a man of upright principles; his couplets were in the best of taste, for all that Voltaire twitted him and called him 'Babet the flower-girl'. Voltaire was poor too, touchy, but not proud, very thin, a worrying restless friend always trying to make use of her, always climbing, always licking the dust before a title in order to further his ambitions, literary, social and otherwise. Yet in that spring of 1745 they were all three very happy together: Bernis was tolerant of Voltaire, though he himself was a man who said that he always loved God. Voltaire and Toinette often laughed at Bernis, one of whose best stories was of hastily leaving a supper party, as he'd suddenly remembered that another friend of his would now be needing the suit of clothes hired for the occasion. He was too poor to own one.

'Madame,' said Dorine mincingly, 'the marquis and marquise de Hauteroche from the château have called.'

Toinette burst into peals of laughter, remembering how haughtily these people had eyed her on the way to the royal hunt.

'How diverting!' she said. 'I little knew that the rumour of my exalted position had reached their ears. Do they look festive, Dorine?'

'Ah Madame,' replied Dorine mischievously, 'Madame la Marquise is dressed in her very best farthingale of fifty years ago, her *fontanges* is artificial and a moth flew out of her toque.'

'Are you sure it was not a bat, Dorine? Anyhow, tell them I am *desolate*, but that I await at any moment the visit of the duc de Soubise and can therefore see no one. And watch their faces as you say it!'

Then all three fell to talking about the King's wonderful victory at Fontenoy, with its 'Tirez les premiers, Messieurs les Anglais'; together they pictured the *tricornes* lifted on bayonets to cries of 'Vive le roi', the sick maréchal de Saxe



MADAME DE POMPADOUR

From a painting by Boucher in the Victoria and  
Albert Museum

*Photograph : W. F. Mansell*

## VOLTAIRE WRITES A POEM

giving orders from his osier carriage while the Dauphin wrote the news to his mother on a drum. Then they discussed the delightful title of 'marquise de Pompadour' which his Majesty had graciously bestowed upon her.

'Apropos of this,' said Voltaire, taking out a roll of parchment from his black coat, 'I have made a little poem—a mere trifle—and I beg leave to lay it at your feet, Marquise.' And he began to read with the courtier's set smile on his wrinkled, intelligent face:

*Sincère et tendre Pompadour  
(Car je peux vous donner d'avance  
Ce nom qui rime avec l'amour  
Et qui sera bientôt le plus beau nom de France.)  
Ce tokai dont votre Excellence  
Dans Étioles me régala,  
N'a-t'il pas quelque ressemblance  
Avec le Roi qui le donna?  
Il est comme lui sans mélange;  
Il unit comme lui, la force et la douceur,  
Plaît aux yeux, enchante le cœur,  
Fait du bien et jamais ne change.*

'Mais c'est charmant, c'est tout à fait charmant,' murmured the marquise.

'And I too have been inspired by my muse to celebrate the charms which merited so pretty a title,' said the abbé de Bernis, putting a womanish hand into his own jacket. And he read with a certain courtly waggishness:

*Ainsi qu' Hébé, la jeune Pompadour  
A deux jolis trous sur sa joue,  
Deux trous charmants où le plaisir se joue,  
Qui furent faits par la main de l'Amour.  
L'enfant ailé, sous un rideau de gaze,*

TOINETTE IS PRESENTED AT COURT

*La vit dormir et la prit pour Psyché—  
Qu'elle était belle! A l'instant, il l'embrasse,  
Sur ses appas il demeure attaché—  
Plus il la voit, plus son délire augmente,  
Et pénétré d'une si douce erreur,  
Il veut mourir sur sa bouche charmante,  
Heureux encore de mourir en vainqueur!  
Enchanté des roses nouvelles,  
D'un teint dont l'éclat l'éblouit,  
Il les touche du doigt, elles en sont plus belles—  
Chaque fleur sous sa main s'ouvre et s'épanouit—  
Pompadour se réveille et l'Amour en soupire;  
Il perd tout son bonheur en perdant son délire,  
L'empreinte de son doigt forma ce joli trou,  
Séjour aimable du sourire,  
Dont le plus sage serait fou!*

'My kind friends,' cried Toinette, 'how can I thank you both? How touching! Voltaire,' she said, espying his jealous sideways glance at Bernis, 'I will send your little verse of the other day to our master:

*Quand Louis, ce héros charmant,  
Dont tout Paris fait son idole,  
Gagne quelque combat brillant,  
On en doit faire compliment  
A la divine d'Étirole.*

'Forgive an intrusion which may seem importunate,' interrupted Bernis, 'but I think you would be well advised not to let his Majesty read that poem, charming though it is, for I have heard that the Queen and Mesdames her daughters were very offended when it reached their ears.'

'Ah, those imbecile fanatical chaplains of theirs,' hissed Voltaire, 'it is they who spoil the success of my great poem on the battle of Fontenoy. Forgive me,' he added, glancing

‘IMBECILE FANATICAL CHAPLAINS’

at Bernis’ ecclesiastical collar. ‘You are not included in the universal deluge of my hatred.’

‘My friend,’ said Bernis, ‘as it is to the Jesuits that you owe your training in the art of rhetoric, you should not tax all priests so hardly. The thing that gave offence at Court was that your praise of certain courtiers was a little . . . indiscriminate, a little universal. Someone said of you

*Il a loué depuis Noailles  
Jusqu’au moindre petit morveux  
Portant talon rouge à Versailles.*

They say it savoured a little of ambition.’

Voltaire took a pinch of snuff and did not reply.

‘Yes,’ teased the marquise, ‘you will never be satisfied until you are an ambassador at least. . . . Confess you were flattered when a whole swarm of pretty ladies begged you to praise in your poem the warlike valour of their remote cousins?’

‘Madame, I only long to serve the master,’ croaked Voltaire, dusting his jabot with a kerchief.

‘And the master is the very person who thinks you dangerous,’ said Bernis. ‘You will never rise to eminence in this country until you give up railing against established religion.’

‘Ah, my friend, *you* need not preach,’ said Voltaire silkily. ‘The cardinal de Fleury saw he could not give *you* any promotion in the Church till you had renounced your pretty couplets and had ceased being the rage in ladies’ *salons*. He refused to help you.’

‘Do you remember my reply?’ countered Bernis, savouring the reminiscence of his revenge. ‘I said, “I will wait.” For he was very old. . . .’

And all three laughed.

In July, the official warrant creating Toinette marquise de Pompadour came from the King. This gave her the right to

## TOINETTE IS PRESENTED AT COURT

have three towers engraved on her notepaper and to put her servants into livery. To celebrate, Voltaire wrote a poem beginning:

*Il sait aimer, il sait combattre:  
Il envoit en ce beau séjour  
Un brevet digne d'Henri Quatre,  
Signé Louis, Mars et l'Amour.*

Voltaire's aim was to associate her with all his many enmities and ambitions; to achieve this, he whirled her in a vortex of flattery. Directly he heard that she was coming to Étioles in May, he had written suggesting himself for a visit. He intoxicated the little *bourgeoise* by describing her as the Egeria of philosophers and the Aspasia of writers—though, to be sure, he would never admit that any author save himself was worth patronizing and he certainly got his envious talons well into harmless Crébillon, Toinette's old master, who had fallen on evil days. Voltaire had the distinction of being the first of many persons to fawn for favours before the marquise at the outset of her career.

Pompadour's official triumph started with Louis' return from the army. On September 10th, when the entire royal family, worn out by public festivities and speeches, was coming from Paris, a coach of the royal stables, without attracting attention, brought to Versailles the marquise de Pompadour accompanied by her husband's cousin, the comtesse d'Estrades—a woman with shifty eyes and fat down-hanging cheeks. Toinette was then taken in an osier chair called 'flying arm-chair' or *chaise à se guinder* up one hundred stairs, above the *grands appartements*, to the attic which had belonged to the duchesse de Châteauroux and which had been done up for her during the summer. One can picture her going to inspect it before leaving for Étioles and before it had been dismantled of the blue decorations of its former unhappy owner. Nattier's

## PRESENTATION DRESS

portrait of the duchesse in the robes of summer, with the grave eyes and the proud flower-crowned brow, was no more to be found above the door. The interesting historical fact remains that the picture disappeared in the spring of 1745, and one surmises that Toinette ordered it to be spirited out of sight. She would not have her room haunted by the gaze of a dead mistress.

She had hardly any time to take stock of her surroundings, for on September 14th she was to be presented to the Queen. A few days before this ceremony, which the ladies of the Court regarded as an outrage, the abbé d'Aydie happened to say to the princesse de Conti: 'Who is the —— who will present such a woman to the Queen?' The princesse doubled up in an explosion of laughter and said in that loud forceful voice which was traditional among the very old families—*la voix de l'ancienne France*—'Say no more, for it is I!' She had in fact tried to curry favour by asking the King for the honour of presenting the marquise, and then had run to tell the Queen that she had yielded to the express desire of his Majesty.

Madame de Genlis tells us about the intricate etiquette of the presentation curtsy. Probably Madame de Tencin had taught Toinette all the minutiae, and in any case she was a consummate actress and could carry it off without embarrassment. The Court dress was unsightly and uncomfortable. It consisted of a huge panniered or hooped petticoat which could weigh upwards of forty pounds, and a train called *bas de robe*. The maréchal de Saxe said it was heavier than his cuirass, and the weight must have been intolerable for such a long time on end. The train was narrow and extremely long, and one had to learn how to kick it delicately but firmly out of the way as one walked backwards out of the Queen's presence. It could cause an awkward and very humiliating fall before a thousand feline, almost fiendish eyes.

On Tuesday, September 14th, at six o'clock, the whole



## TOINETTE IS PRESENTED AT COURT

Court, seething with ill-suppressed whispers and sniggers of contempt, was crowded into the beautiful reception rooms to watch this extraordinary scene. The atmosphere was electric with unspoken malevolence. Quizzing glasses were raised on all sides. At length the princesse de Conti broke through the throng. She was covered in diamonds. Behind her walked the beautiful and exquisitely poised marquise de Pompadour. First she was presented to the King, who looked extremely uncomfortable. Then she was taken to the Queen's *salon*. Not a whisper could be heard as all ears were strained to catch the conversation which everybody had determined beforehand should be coldly formal. When Toinette looked up at the Queen in her last curtsy, instead of finding, as she had feared, a face of angry scorn, she was much taken aback by the unutterably kind glance of the resigned blue eyes, the bitter-sweet smile, the graciousness of this faded woman. Toinette lost a little of her composure, for as she was taking off one of her gloves before touching the bottom of the Queen's dress, she broke a bracelet and it fell on the carpet. She was further disarmed when the Queen enquired kindly about some well-born connection of her husband's. Toinette looked up and said in a voice husky with emotion:

'Madame, I burn with a passion to please you.'

The Dauphin, however, when it came to his turn to give the accolade, stuck out his tongue at her, just as he had done at a fancy-dress ball given for the duchesse de Châteauroux. (The King heard of this and sent him to Meudon in disgrace.)

## CHAPTER XII

### THE MARQUISE FEELS HER WAY

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*Pompadour's lodgings at Versailles in Attique du Nord. Petits Cabinets of Louis. Pompadour's furniture and flowers. Court ladies mock her lack of breeding. Examples. She is universally tittered at. Poissonnades or popular songs written against her. Louis' dullness and morbid love of corpses. She tries to allay his ennui by variety of entertainment. They spend all their time together. She understands him. Louis grows more talkative. Diverting anecdote. Riding and fashionable sledging in furs. Revenge of aristocrat at her toilette. Her successful supper parties. Louis' noble qualities. Pompadour becomes popular by being very obliging. Louis gives Marie a tobacco box and some new furniture. Queen trapped into dining with Pompadour. Queen makes Pompadour look ridiculous. Her subtle retaliation. Pompadour snubbed when she tries to assist at religious ceremonies. Later she is treated with consideration.*

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*'For the lips of a harlot are like a honeycomb dropping, and her throat is smother than oil.*

*'But her end is bitter as wormwood, and sharp as a two-edged sword.*

*'Her feet go down into death: and her steps go in as far as hell.'*  
(PROVERBS v. 3, 4, 5. Douay.)

Pompadour's little suite of rooms can still be seen at Versailles, and is almost unchanged,<sup>1</sup> in spite of having been used as a flat by a government official in the nineteenth century.

This modest suite of six medium-sized rooms is situated

<sup>1</sup> Permission to see it can be obtained from the *Conservateur*. It is hard to imagine a more delightful way of spending an hour than loitering up there.

## THE MARQUISE FEELS HER WAY

under the roof in the Attique du Nord, overlooking the lawns and bronze vases of the Parterre du Nord designed by Claude Perrault in 1664. From the windows can be seen, as in Pompadour's day, Coysevox's beautiful statue of the crouching Venus, a glimpse of the Bassin de Neptune, tall hedges of yew and hornbeam, box-edged flower-beds in intricate patterns, and in the distance, to the left, the wide expanse of the lake called Grand Canal. The horizon was shut in by poplars and farther off by the forest of Marly, full of hunting memories for Louis. The trees, which had been cut back, have now grown to their original height of 1745. The furniture belonging to the duchesse de Châteauroux had been left practically in the same position. The bedroom still keeps its woodwork panels, with the simple and elegant design of sea-shells after the manner of Verbreck. The bed alcove with its arch crowned with a flowered coat of arms opened between two closets which looked like cupboards. The original fire-backs and marble chimneys still remain.

Louis' privacy was secure up there, for the footmen never admitted anyone save by invitation: if he were urgently needed, the ministers wrote a note. One of the fascinations of Versailles is the labyrinth of secret staircases and beautifully decorated closets overlooking little courtyards. The hidden roof-terraces were full of shrubs, flowers and aviaries of rare birds. All this was quite unknown to the general public. Only a few privileged courtiers were admitted to these 'delicious retreats', as they called them, while those excluded called them 'rats' nests'. There is no more pleasant pastime than trying to find one's way along these passages and staircases: it would be Paradise to Monsieur Lenotre. Even guides have been known to lose their way.

In the suite called Petits Cabinets situated above his official bedroom, Louis had his library full of drawings, books and geographical maps, his private kitchens, which included his

## LOUIS' PRIVATE ATTICS

jam-making rooms and distilleries, his collection of tools, his bathroom and his closet of precious medals. The mouldings of the low-built rooms were varnished instead of gilded, and were painted with the celebrated 'Vernis Martin', traces of which can still be seen where the recent stuff has been rubbed off. The green shade of 'Vernis Martin' is a deep-toned, highly polished jade. The principal room was the small gallery of the *Petits Appartements* reserved for games and decorated with pictures of the hunting of wild animals, by Lancret, Pater, Carle Van Loo, Parrocel and Boucher. Here Louis could fancy he was a private individual, far from the high frozen rooms of his public suite. He very rarely invited his children. But the numerous staircases led to one inconvenience—his servants found it difficult to guard the many doors, and occasionally strangers who had lost their way strayed in by mistake; one poor man was so upset when Louis surprised him wandering about that he had to be soothed down with a gold piece. The great advantage of the *Petits Cabinets* for Louis was that he could go straight from them to the *Pompadour* by a secret staircase. The duc de Croÿ, after having supper with Louis, writes in his memoirs about his 'last closet at the back, which was open, and where one saw his desk and all his lists and catalogues on all the muster-rolls, ranks or posts; it was full of books and instruments, above all the beautiful clock.<sup>1</sup> There were also some lovely flowers. I should have liked very much to rummage in all that for several hours.'

One must be careful to distinguish between the King's *Cabinets* of the first floor and the smaller ones on the higher floors. The first were tall and full of light which poured in from the big bay windows on to the high mirrors and the crystal lustres; their white and gold walls were decorated with

<sup>1</sup> It can still be seen in 'le salon de la pendule', marking the date 'October 31st, 1789'. It has not been wound up and set since that fatal month.

## THE MARQUISE FEELS HER WAY

sculptures of plump children playing with trophies of love, war and hunting. But the *cabinets* of the upper floors had an air of downy comfort with their grey ungilded walls in discreet harmony with the low ceilings. Up there was the intimate dining-room with its two famous pictures—Lancret's 'Déjeuner de Jambon' and de Troy's 'Déjeuner d'Huîtres'—both calculated to excite conviviality and whet the appetite. As Pierre Gaxotte has said of these upper floors, 'the calm, the half-shade, the difficulty of access—everything here gives the impression of a far-away hidden retreat, the whim of some meditative, magnificent and refined *grand seigneur*.'

One can imagine, too, how the fastidious de Croÿ would have appreciated the pictures by Titian, Rubens and Van Dyck in the bedroom, or the Veronese, the Poussins, the 'Holy Family' of Raphael and the 'Erasmus' of Holbein in the study he had glimpsed through a half-open door.

Documents help us to visualize the possessions of the marquise—the harpsichord, the chairs wide enough for ample panniers, the blue satin curtains beautifully embroidered with silver flowers and pinks, the canvases of picnics under tall trees where slender youths in masks sit at ladies' feet playing the guitar. Lazare Duvaux, a furniture dealer in the rue St. Honoré, recorded all he sold in a day book; under May 1750, when she bought Bellevue, he writes that Madame de Pompadour purchased from him, amongst other things, two china cocks costing 240 livres. She also bought from him at various times lacquered chests, Sèvres vases and a 'chaise percée à dossier' with rosewood 'plaques', ornamented in gilt and bronze, costing 715 livres.

Above all Pompadour indulged her passion for flowers—one can picture her confabulating with her head gardener and seeing that the flowers she ordered were placed in unusual vases—Christmas roses in china elephants, lilies-of-the-valley

## FIRST SNUBBINGS

in sea-green chalices, freakish tulips in porcelain monkeys. *Pot-pourri* and musk embalmed the air through the pierced lids of various precious containers. The rooms glowed in the mellow light of tall tapers or flickering wood fire.

When Dorine had unpacked all her dresses and hats and placed them in the clothes passage beyond the boudoir, Pompadour settled down and began the fight to stabilize her position. At first, that contest was so acrimonious that it probably spoilt the pleasures of the King's early love-making. The infuriated ladies of the Court sought the one weak spot in Toinette's armour—her lack of good breeding—and started at once to thrust into it a thousand poisoned shafts of feminine malice. When they twitted Louis about his mistress's lack of *bon ton*, he laughed a little uncomfortably and said that it would amuse him to educate her up to it.

She had indeed to pay the price of being the first *bourgeoise* mistress of a French king. One day, in the Dauphin's carriage at Fontainebleau, into which she had pushed herself with thick-skinned effrontery, the Dauphin, his wife and sisters all turned their backs on her and treated her conversational overtures with frigid silence. One would have to be very insensitive to survive that. Then she tried to get Dagé, a very fashionable but *difficile* hairdresser who had attended the duchesse de Châteauroux, and who did not wish to demean himself by crispering the locks of a commoner. At her brilliant overcrowded *toilette*, when he had at last condescended to come, she asked him why he had become so much the rage. He replied:

'I was the *other one's* hairdresser.'

Everybody tittered, and before nightfall the story was all over the palace.

The elegant ladies of the Court, after spying on her day and night, found in Pompadour many signs of the lack of that *bel*

## THE MARQUISE FEELS HER WAY

*air* which cannot be acquired but which is handed down like a natural tradition in the blood of a caste. They noted her smallest errors in etiquette, and discovered her shocking habit of calling strangers by familiar nicknames. The duc de Chaulnes suffered under the endearment 'mon cochon'. . . .

The mockery of these ladies, magnifying all they could discover about Pompadour's disreputable ancestry, was echoed by the common people in Paris, who repeated rumours spread by Maurepas, still full of hatred for royal mistresses. Floods of libellous songs called *Poissonnades* were sung everywhere. Maurepas, entertaining high society at his supper parties, gave imitations of Pompadour—her little airs and graces, her speech. And the mob sang horrible ditties of which the following, coming later in her career, when her looks declined, is a fair example:

*La contenance éventée,  
La peau jaune et truitée,  
Et chaque dent tachetée,  
Les yeux froids, et le cou long, long, long.  
Sans esprit, sans caractère,  
L'âme vile et mercenaire,  
Le propos d'une commère,  
Tout est bas chez la Poisson, son, son.*

Subjects like Maurepas did just as much to destroy the prestige of the French monarchy as the Kings themselves.

There was always a kind friend to keep Pompadour informed of all that was said or sung about her. It was a consolation, however, that the King had looked less bored of late: she felt almost rewarded for her efforts when he sang at Choisy—a little out of tune perhaps, but still, *sang* about . . . Adam:

*Il n'eut qu'une femme avec lui,  
Encore c'était la sienne.*

## LOUIS' LOVE OF CORPSES

*Ici, je vois celle d'autrui  
Et n'y vois point la mienne.*

She wished sometimes that he would protect her a little more vigorously against her enemies: she felt as if she were fighting the whole palace single-handed. (Though, to be sure, Louis *had* made old King Stanislas Leczinski feel unwanted when he came uninvited to visit them at Choisy the other day!)

Pompadour, who had been used to the conversation of brilliant men, found it a little difficult at first to cope with Louis' small talk and the paucity of his imagination. What boring topics were his when he chose to emerge from his terrifying long silences '*comme chez les Anglais*'—the calendar, the rites and ceremonies of the Church, the morbid details of illnesses and surgical operations, and above all, Death. How *macabre*! He spoke much of decay as one who feared it. He relished the sight of tombs. One day, on the way to Crécy, he said: 'You see that little hillock? There are crosses there and it is most certainly a cemetery. Go there,' turning to his equerry, 'and see if there is some freshly dug grave.' The equerry galloped away; when he returned he said, 'There are three graves, all freshly dug.' The little *maréchale de Mirepoix* who was with them was delighted. 'Really, it's enough to make your mouth water,' she exclaimed.

Pompadour strove every hour of her day and night to allay his listlessness, his ennui, that terrible malady which had shrivelled his egoistic heart. Like a tight-rope dancer, she smiled within a hair's breadth of disaster, binding Louis by force of habit, ever fearful of his ruthless way of suddenly cutting people out of his life. She had little respite. In the morning he came to her after his official *lever*, stayed till Mass, returned, ate a cutlet in her room and remained till the evening



## THE MARQUISE FEELS HER WAY

if there was a council meeting. He would come back for late supper, leave her awhile for his official *coucher*, then return again and stay till morning. She had no time for exercise or privacy or rest; she must forever be changing her gowns, doing up her face, which looked so peaked without make-up, be gay, amusing, different. She must enchant by variety—sing an *aria* from a fashionable opera or a fresh and joyful song of the times well suited to her delicate voice, play on the harpsichord, recount long love-stories (her library contained a good stock), recite by heart whole scenes from comedies, respond to his caresses. Illness afforded no rest. He grew to rely upon her so entirely that one day, when she was too ill to come to the drawing-room, he enquired drily whether she had a temperature, and being told she had not, said: 'Well, let her come down.' He was like Louis XIV in that way.

Pompadour had a complete intuition of Louis' moral temperament, a delicate, tactful knowledge of his nervous sensibilities. She pitied him. She had the rare gift of giving to all she touched the charm of surprise; even her trifling banter had the unexpected turn which keeps an audience listening. She did not allow ministers to worry him: 'Come, come, Monsieur de Maurepas, you are making the King look bilious. . . . Good-bye, Monsieur de Maurepas.' Added to that, as a contemporary writer (publishing in Holland in 1759) has said, 'she excelled in never prolonging any amusement beyond the point at which her exquisite discernment taught her that it might conceivably begin to pall.' The few half hours that the King was away, she was feverishly trying on new gowns and ornaments from the visiting dressmakers, ordering that dress of English point lace which cost 22,500 francs, giving orders to her excellent cook for varied gastronomic surprises (a pity strawberries were not always in season! for they were the King's passion), sitting for her portrait, arranging fresh bouquets of flowers, learning different songs or buying rare



LA MODISTE

From a painting by Boucher in the Wallace Collection

*Photograph : W. F. Mansell*

## LOUIS DISTURBS A BISHOP'S SLUMBERS

*bibelots* to scatter on the little tables of her *appartement*. Dorine was worn out, even though she was now assisted by a large staff of seamstresses and laundry-maids.

Louis grew more expansive under Pompadour's influence; it cheered her to see him talking 'much and well', as the duc de Croÿ noted. On one occasion he even told a good story against himself:

After dinner one day the King goes to his daughter Madame Victoire's rooms. He calls a boy, gives him a letter and tells him to find Monsieur de Choiseul. The boy is told Choiseul is with Monsieur de Penthièvre. He gives him the letter. Choiseul tells Cadet, his wife's chief lackey, to go and find the Bishop of Orléans. After one and a half hours Cadet comes back, says he got no answer at the Bishop's door and that he is not in town. Choiseul himself climbs one hundred and twenty-eight stairs and knocks at the Bishop's door until he is answered. The Bishop is in bed. He wakes up. 'Who is there?' 'It is I; it is a letter from the King.' 'A letter from the King! Hé, mon Dieu, what time is it?' 'Two o'clock.' He takes the letter. 'I can't read it without spectacles.' 'Where are they?' 'In my trousers.' While the spectacles are fetched they wonder: 'What can this letter contain? Has the Archbishop of Paris died suddenly? Has some bishop hanged himself?' The Bishop reads. He gives the letter to Choiseul who sees these words:

'Monseigneur l'évêque d'Orléans,

'My daughters want some *cotignac* [quince jellies in pine-wood boxes for which Orléans is famous], they want very small boxes, send for some, please, if you have none [Here there was a drawing of a carrying chair, and under the chair was written:] will you send for some at once to your episcopal city, and let them be very lovely little boxes—May God have you in His most holy keeping, my lord Bishop.

'LOUIS.'

## THE MARQUISE FEELS HER WAY

'The carrying chair does not mean anything, it was scribbled on this sheet by my daughters before I used it.'

The two ministers were astonished: the courier was sent at once: the *cotignac* arrived next day: the King had almost forgotten about it.

Sometimes Pompadour had to ride to a meet. Although she was an elegant horsewoman, it was a trial to become the 'cynosure of neighbouring eyes': in the palace alone there were more than five thousand people, and a great many of them would be peering behind the windows to watch her riding out. It was the same in winter when she indulged in the fashionable pastime of sledging on the 'Tapis Vert', dressed in her little fur bonnet, in a sledge driven by her manservant 'à la Muscovite'. She almost envied the statues muffled in their still cloaks of snow—the only whisperings which reached *their* marble ears were the winter winds sighing in the sepulchral alleys of the gardens, kinder by far than the hissings which followed her everywhere. She would bury the end of her nose in her muff, not from coyness, but from mortification. She planned to humiliate these popinjays in the future. Those bitter early days at Versailles turned Toinette from a good-natured young woman into someone so vindictive that she acquired the reputation of never forgiving an injury.

One day a brilliant little revenge wasped its way into her brain. Louis had introduced some of his friends to her by inviting them to supper (and, of course, their wives were furious): Messieurs de Gontaut, d'Ayen, de Meuse, de Duras, de Richelieu and le maréchal de Saxe mingled with Pompadour's friends—Duclos, Voltaire, Gentil-Bernard, Moncrif, l'Abbé Prévost, l'abbé de Bernis. Later, they flocked to her morning *toilette*. Pompadour had been ferreting out the etiquette of Louis XIV's Court from the memoirs of Saint-Simon and Dangeau. One day she ordered every single chair to be

## POMPADOUR'S FIRST SUPPER PARTIES

removed from her bedchamber, save her own before the dressing table. The aristocrats were obliged to stand as if in the presence of royalty. Not so the reckless marquis de Souvré, 'the last fool of the Monarchy'; he sat down on the arm of her chair, thus almost preventing her from moving. There was an audible gasp in the room and Pompadour went pink with indignation. When she complained to the King, saying; 'Souvré sat down in front of me!' as if it were a crime, Louis could not refrain from laughing. When he taxed Souvré with his conduct, that gentleman replied that he had been very tired. Pompadour nursed her resentment for some time and took the first opportunity to have him dismissed.

She soon realized that she must walk more warily at first, that she must win friends before making enemies. It was the little suppers in her own rooms which gave her the opportunity to wield a powerful weapon. She could invite anyone she liked to meet the King, so that courtiers had to be obsequious to her before they received the privileged invitation. These hunting suppers, which took place three or four times a week, had become quite a regular institution. It is to the duc de Croÿ,<sup>1</sup> an eye-witness of integrity, that we owe a fair description of what the embittered d'Argenson called 'orgies'. Here is his famous account of one of these little parties:

'After going upstairs, we waited for supper in the little drawing-room; the King arrived only in time to go to table with the ladies. The dining-room was charming and the supper very agreeable, without constraint; we were served by two or three footmen of the wardrobe, who went out after having helped us to all that we should have before us. Decorum

<sup>1</sup> The duc de Croÿ was one of the many examples of high-minded noblemen in the eighteenth century. Above all, he was a philosopher: '... finding nothing solid in the world, I gave myself up more and more to the interior life.' He was quite charmed with Pompadour, who, he says, always anticipated his wishes and had winning manners; moreover, he 'never found her false in anything'.

## THE MARQUISE FEELS HER WAY

combined with freedom seemed to me to be well observed there; the King was gay, unconstrained but always with an air of grandeur which made it impossible to forget who he was; he no longer appeared timid, but very much at his ease, talking very well and a great deal, enjoying himself and knowing on this occasion how to do so. He seemed very much in love with Madame de Pompadour, and did not hide the fact, having shaken off all shame and apparently taken his stand, whether he had become heedless or otherwise, having identified himself with the opinions of the world on this point, without giving up other feelings, that is to say arranging for himself principles (as many people do) according to his tastes or passions. He appeared to me to be very conversant with little things and little details without being inconvenienced by them, and without committing himself in the big things. Discretion was inborn with him; however, it is believed that in private life he told the marquise nearly everything. In general, according to the standards of high society, he appeared to me very lofty in this particular, and all that was very well regulated.

'I noticed that he spoke waggishly to the marquise of his campaign, as if he really wanted to set out on the first of May. It seemed to me that he spoke to her very freely, as to a mistress whom he loved and whom he felt he only possessed for that purpose, and she, behaving herself very well, had a good deal of influence, but the King always wanted to be absolute master and was firm on that point. . . .' The duc goes on to say: 'The King was, as I have said, very much at his ease, fond of his old friends, finding it difficult to be separated from them and not liking new faces.' Eighteen guests were squeezed in at table. 'Le maréchal de Saxe was there, but did not sit down to table, as he had just dined; he only hooked up titbits, being very greedy. The King, who always called him "comte de Saxe", appeared to love and value him very much, and he

## GOOD QUALITIES OF LOUIS

returned these sentiments with admirable frankness and appropriateness. . . . Then the King went into the little drawing-room; there he warmed his coffee and poured it out himself, for no one came there and one helped oneself.' After cards, which Pompadour disliked and did not play, 'Madame de Pompadour pressed him to retire and, as she was falling asleep herself, he got up at one o'clock and said half aloud (so it seemed to me) and gaily: "Come along! Let's go to bed." The ladies curtsied and went away, and he also bowed and shut himself up in his *Petits Cabinets*; and we all went down by the little staircase of Madame de Pompadour where there is a door, and returned by the *appartements* to his public *coucher* as usual, which took place at once.' The ladies of whom de Croÿ writes were probably Pompadour's own friends—Mesdames d'Estrades, de Mirepoix, d'Amblimont and de Lutzelbourg.

Elsewhere, de Croÿ speaks of Louis himself. 'He cut a very fine figure, being the handsomest man of his Court, with his proud and noble air; moreover he spoke marvellously well on all subjects, and although he had not enough self-assurance, found it too difficult to take any one side, and therefore allowed himself to be led too much, he possessed, in addition to his conversation, all that was needed to make the greatest king in the world, having understanding, knowledge and memory, being brave, active, indefatigable, good and firm when it was needed. It would only have been necessary for him to have been much less of a braggart and to possess some of the great and firm and magnanimous qualities of Louis XIV, and perhaps France would not have been so unhappy.'

All this is certainly an improvement on the champagne drinking at the house of Mademoiselle de Charolais.

Apart from the charming impression which Pompadour made at these suppers, the feeling grew that, as there must be a mistress, she was rather better than any other. She was

## THE MARQUISE FEELS HER WAY

extremely obliging and never allowed backbiting in her presence; her conduct with regard to the Queen was so tactful that it gave her quite a reputation for kind-heartedness. On January 1st, 1746, for the first time in many years, Louis gave Marie a New Year's gift—a gold tobacco box with a watch encrusted on it. She might have been less touched if she had known that the box had been ordered for Madame Poisson, Toinette's mother, who had died before it was ready. At Choisy in the autumn of 1745, Louis had a temperature and was bled. When Marie asked if she might come and visit him she was surprised to receive a message that he would welcome her with pleasure, that she would find a good dinner at the château and Sunday Vespers and Benediction at the parish church—two things she liked well, for *gourmandise* is always the last *petit péché mignon* of the *dévot*e. He greeted her cordially, did her the honours of the château and showed her the new room upholstered in white satin embroidered with gold and chenille and the closet furnished with flowered velvet. Alas, it was but to soften the bitter humiliation he had reserved for her: the ladies of Choisy dined with the Queen that night and Pompadour was among them.

One day, however, when Marie returned to Versailles from Choisy, she found that Louis had given orders for her bedroom to be re-decorated, the gilding cleaned, and the ancient bed with posts called *lit en quenouille* replaced by a fashionable *lit à la duchesse*, which has a head-board covered in flame-coloured damask. The tapestries were all new, and she was delighted to find that they represented subjects from the Bible. Moreover the King now paid her debts. She only got into financial difficulties through charity, for she had made it a rule never to buy anything for herself on the spur of the moment, but to think it over till the morrow: by then the thought of what she could give to others would usually have gained supremacy.



## MARIE ATTEMPTS TO SNUB POMPADOUR

How pleasant it was to find Pompadour so respectful, after the veiled insolence of the late duchesse! Hearing that Marie loved flowers, Pompadour brought her beautiful posies and sheaves of her favourite blooms from the gardens of Trianon and Choisy, and baskets of pineapples and choice fruits arranged in pyramids to look like Dutch still-lives. One day Pompadour came in to the Queen with a large basket of flowers which she held without wearing long gloves as a sign of respect. Marie, who still had flashes of her Polish 'malice', admired her arms and her beauty in detail, as if to justify Louis' choice. She praised these attributes in a superior tone which was secretly wounding. All the ladies around smiled, and Pompadour found her basket getting as heavy as the situation was uncomfortable. To her dismay, the Queen then asked her to sing so that she could hear the voice so much praised by the King. Pompadour was very unwilling, but the Queen commanded; so standing just as she was, holding the flowers in front of her, she sang Armide's monologue: 'After all he is in my power'. The ladies, catching the expression on the Queen's countenance, found it difficult not to smile once more.

Whenever Marie was ill Pompadour asked for news of her through her devoted duchesse de Luynes. Pompadour was really most assiduous. One day she sent a message to say that as she had been bled the evening before she regretted *infiniment* that she could not assist at a charity assembly the Queen was giving; but she implored the duchesse de Luynes to accept a *louis* for her collection. Sometimes her attentions lacked good taste, and she sought with tiresome persistence one of those *distinctions d'étiquette* which would make her like the other ladies of the Court, such as a place in her Majesty's carriage. But when a matter of religious principle was involved Marie could be adamant. She declined her assistance in the ceremonial washing of the feet of twelve poor girls on Maundy

## THE MARQUISE FEELS HER WAY

Thursday (that rite which had once roused such a storm about precedence among the ladies). Marie answered amiably that the marquise would gain the merit of her offer without incurring the trouble, as she already had the requisite number of ladies. Then again Pompadour worried the Queen for permission to assist in the collection in chapel on Easter Sunday. . . . Expert though she was in all other niceties of conduct, Pompadour could not be expected to understand these scruples of a delicate conscience. However, she seemed sincerely devoted to Marie and later on, as de Croÿ notes, she 'had won over the royal family with many attentions and signs of respect, and had tried to gain their confidence and was in good odour with them, particularly with the Queen'. In fact, at a supper at La Meutte when Pompadour had left the table with bad *migraine*, one member of the royal family after another went to enquire about her with 'assiduous attention'. But that was much later and only at the end of a weary fight under a shower of humiliations. In the meantime Pompadour let it be known that it was owing to *her* that the King took a greater interest in his children. Mesdames laughed and called her 'Maman p——'. As for Marie, she had nothing more to expect of life: Pompadour would be playing cards with her ladies 'very gracefully and decorously' as the hour struck for Pompadour to go to Louis, and when she asked for permission to leave, Marie would say quite good-naturedly: 'Allez.'

## CHAPTER XIII

### AMATEUR THEATRICALS AND THE SUPPRESSION OF ENEMIES

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*Pompadour distracts Louis by dancing and disguises. Lenten concerts to stifle remorse. Pompadour's power of patronage wielded by amateur theatricals. Tartufe. Pompadour's singing and dancing. Popularity of the performances. The company. The staff. Notrelle's marvellous wigs. The regulations. The music. The extraordinary properties. Cochin designs entrance tickets. Expenses. Mutterings from Paris. Gabriel builds new theatre. Richelieu makes trouble. His hatred of Pompadour. The third and last theatre at Bellevue.*

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*'Étranges animaux à conduire qu'une troupe de comédiens.'*

(MOLIÈRE.)

Pompadour had two problems: how to amuse the King, and how to increase her power by putting the Court more in her debt. She solved them both by founding a company of actors and actresses for amateur theatricals. Louis loved disguises and dancing—he liked to watch an *al fresco* minuet danced in a grove by the little ‘figurines de Saxe’ holding each other at arm’s length because of the ladies’ panniers, while Pompadour’s young voice piped out:

*Nous n’irons plus au bois,  
Les lauriers sont coupés.*

Also he enjoyed seeing Pompadour in a new disguise several times a day, dressed now in the tunic of a sultaness or in a Watteau *déshabillé*, now as a nun, a nymph or a shepherdess, now as ‘la belle jardinière’ in a straw hat lined with her favourite blue.

## AMATEUR THEATRICALS

During the Lenten season, to stifle Louis' vague remorse and sweeten his melancholia, Pompadour would arrange Holy Week for him as if it were an opera. She would give concerts of motets and spiritual music sung in her *attique* by the musicians of the King's household. By singing herself sometimes, she prepared the way for a theatre whose magic would hold him in thrall. Did not Madame de Maintenon bring Louis XIV to performances of *Esther* at St.-Cyr? Certainly Louis XV detested the ladies of St.-Cyr as much as he detested Jansenists and men of letters. But *this* would be much more piquant: instead of Racine's tragic verses, the sacred choirs and biblical dramas, there would be rhymed allusions, ariettas, light opera or comedies; and instead of the long skirts of the St.-Cyr damsels, the panniers overloaded with shimmering blond lace, garlands and festoons worn by the personal friends she selected for the privilege of acting before the King. What a weapon! Madame de Hausset, Pompadour's *femme de chambre*, writes in her memoirs that even a minor part was eagerly sought after as if it were an enormous honour. She would assume thus the role of mistress of pleasures, amuse the *entourage* and be the means of making herself agreeable to many people. She could create a little kingdom of favourites. But above all, she would now find the way in which her own beauty and talents could unfold and blossom in a suitable setting. She would fascinate his eyes, enchant his ears. She knew by her successes at Étioles, on the stage built for her by Uncle Tournehem, that she had a gift for comedy—here she could be vivid and sprightly, arrayed in all the provocative dresses of the day. The natural  *finesse* of her smile, the archness of her glance, would stand her in good stead. For she, of course, would take all the principal parts.

The choice of *Tartufe*<sup>1</sup> as the opening piece was typical:

<sup>1</sup> Louis XIV had put a stop to any performances of *Tartufe*, as they might harm the cause of religion.

## POMPADOUR ACTS IN 'TARTUFE'

Pompadour, in the part of Dorine, refused the handkerchief offered by the religious hypocrite to hide her dazzling bosom: thus she sought to enfeeble by ridicule the religious scruples haunting the King's mind, those tiresome scruples which once had caused the downfall of the duchesse de Châteauroux. After secret rehearsals at Choisy, *Tartufe* was first acted on January 16th, 1747, in Mignard's *petite galerie des Cabinets*. It caused very little expense, as the play spoke to the intelligence rather than to the eyes. In this intimate small theatre there was no stifling etiquette; Louis was seated in a simple armchair, and, for the first time in French history, the select little audience of fourteen people was allowed to clap in the presence of the King. After the performance, as everybody was going out, the King was heard to say to Pompadour: 'You are the most charming woman in the whole of France.' After the play there followed a few quadrilles. From that, it was but a step to little one-act operas with ballets at the end, for Pompadour, with all the advantages of her early training, was as exquisite in her dancing as in her acting. The numbers of the audience increased imperceptibly, everyone began to talk of it, and soon the Monday performances became just as much a part of the routine life of Versailles as the weekly Court operas or plays of the *Comédie Italienne*. The company became more organized: the duc de La Vallière was made stage manager, Moncrif (the Queen's friend) assistant stage manager and copyist of music, Pompadour's librarian, the abbé de la Garde, secretary and prompter; two professional actresses from the *Comédie Française* were hired to give experienced advice and to superintend rehearsals, though not of course to act, for actresses were socially ostracized in the eighteenth century, and the company was very exclusive. The wig-maker was the famous Notrelle. He put in the almanack the following advertisement: 'Le sieur Notrelle, wig-maker to the *Menus Plaisirs* of the King and to all the theatres, place

du Carrousel, has exhausted the resources of his art to reproduce the wigs of gods, demons, heroes, shepherds, tritons, cyclops, naiads, furies, etc. Although these persons, both mythological and real, were unacquainted with the custom, his powerful imagination has enabled him to divine what would have been their taste in this direction, had the fashion of wearing wigs existed in their time. To these sublime wigs he has added a collection of beards and moustaches, of all colours and shapes, both ancient and modern.'

Besides the singers of the Chapel Royal, who were chosen in order of seniority to prevent jealousy, Pompadour commanded the services of the most distinguished amateur musicians in the kingdom for her little orchestra: the prince de Dombes played the bassoon, the marquis de Sourches performed skilfully on the viola. Dehesse, an actor at the *Comédie Italienne*, arranged and led the ballets, danced by children from nine to twelve years old. The members of the company were selected for their talent: the duc de Chartres himself found difficulty in being admitted. The women were chosen for their loyalty to Pompadour, with the tacit understanding that they would not attempt to outshine her.

The next thing was to draw up a set of rules: the charming wit which inspired this famous little document of statutes is entirely in the clauses relating to the ladies. In article X, about punctual attendance at rehearsals, Pompadour laid down: 'The actresses alone are allowed half an hour's grace, beyond which they will have to pay a fine, the amount of which shall be decided by the ladies alone.' Delightful example of the pretty tyranny exercised by women over men in the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rule VII.* The actresses alone will have the right of choosing the works which the company is to act.

*Rule VIII.* The actresses will equally have the right to name the day of the performances, and fix the number of rehearsals, and the day and hour.

## THEATRE PROPERTIES AND EXPENSES

The duc de Luynes, commenting on their performance of Mondonville's *Bacchus et Erigone*, says that Pompadour sang with great taste though she had not a powerful voice. It seems she was 'the only woman who dances'.

The troupe engaged the services of seven tailors who came to take measurements at Versailles. The catalogue of the theatre properties is comprehensive, ranging from all the accessories for the Elysian Fields and an *embarquement pour Cythère*, to a 'handful of snakes on springs'! It includes 'masks, garlands and bouquets of artificial flowers . . . horsehair crests, Roman boots, gold and silver spangles . . . pasteboard fowls and turkeys, dancing shoes and silk stockings, twelve staves of blue and silver, twelve gourds, four spades, four silver crosiers, four tambourines, four laurel crowns . . . two German flutes, a bow and a quiver of arrows, a pasteboard club, an iron sickle, a perfuming pan . . . a trumpet plated with gold . . . a thunderbolt.' The company even possessed its own entrance tickets—exquisite little slips the size of playing cards whereon Cochin has drawn Columbine on a balcony; she is coquetting with a fan, and Pierrot and Leander are near.

As for the expenses—they increased slowly but surely—first the ladies had to have dressing-rooms built, as it was so awkward for them to walk long distances from their own suites in the palace to the stage in the north wing. Rumours of the extravagance floated into Paris, doubtless through the gossip of outside assistants: it was whispered that Dehesse alone had received 2,000 crowns. All this was probably exaggerated, but it happened to be a most inopportune moment for tales of this sort to be circulating in the capital. Great poverty was on the increase in Paris and the provinces. The national debt was increasing, and though no money could be found to restore the navy, which grew more dilapidated every day, there always seemed to be plenty for the King's buildings, now directed since December 1745 by Uncle Charles de

## AMATEUR THEATRICALS

Tournehem. Pensions were given away prodigally, there were enormous rewards for the smallest services; a million alone had been spent on the return of Madame Victoire from school at Fontevault. The imaginations of the overburdened taxpayers ran riot. The whispers grew into loud murmurs when it was heard that, because the present stage in the long gallery was too small, a new theatre designed by Gabriel was being built. This was inaugurated in November 1748, and the first performance took place in February of the following year.

But matters had not always gone so smoothly for Pompadour. What trouble she had had with Richelieu! She could not exclude him from her supper parties, for Louis adored his wit; and once there, he exasperated her with his wounding familiarities, his slighting tone which made her feel like an upstart *cocotte*. He did everything in his power to annoy her; once, when she was ill, he even danced all night above her head. She felt that this libertine peered with knowing eye into all the privacies of her relationship with Louis, and she revenged herself by making him appear ridiculous in the amatory triumphs of which he bragged. There was the ignominious occasion when he had been obliged to hide up a turning chimney from an irate husband: Pompadour ordered a model of the same chimney to be made, and exhibited it in her rooms so that all the Court could laugh at him.

Richelieu got his own back; for all the theatre properties were under his jurisdiction. How infuriated she must have been that day when the stage manager, Monsieur de La Vallière, rushed in at dress rehearsal and said that Richelieu had issued orders that no chandeliers, jewellery, etc., were to leave the storehouse of the *Menus Plaisirs*, and that no workman or musician was to be employed without his written permission. He also complained that Monsieur de Richelieu had made horns at him and said: 'Vous êtes une bête.' Pompadour



## RICHELIEU AND THE BASTILLE

moaned and stamped. When she implored Louis that night to dismiss Richelieu, he merely replied: 'You don't know Monsieur de Richelieu: if you drive him out by the door, he'll come back by the chimney.'

However, at the unbooting that night, Louis asked Richelieu in icy tones: 'How many times has your Excellency been to the Bastille?' 'Three times,' replied Richelieu, trembling like a leaf.

Nothing more was necessary. The next day the little cockatoo was all smiles: he paid his court to Pompadour and assured her that he attached no importance to the whole affair. The two patched up some sort of show reconciliation, and the wounded susceptibilities of the duc de La Vallière were soothed by the presentation of the *cordons bleu* at Candlemas.

The new theatre had caused such a twittering in Paris that it was deemed politic to appear to give it up; in its place a private miniature theatre, 'un brimborion de théâtre', as Pompadour wrote to her brother Abel, was opened in March 1753 at Bellevue, that château which was the supreme creation of Pompadour's art.

## CHAPTER XIV

### BELLEVUE, OR THE LOVER'S PARADISE

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*Bellevue destroyed by Revolutionary mobs. Pompadour more dismayed at Louis' morbid tastes. He feels pain when laughing. Pompadour's allowance. Sixty servants. Petty pilfering. Thinks she is not rich. Portail's drawing showing site of Bellevue. False rumours about expenses. Pleasures planned for Louis. Gastronomy in the eighteenth century. Boucher paints chapel. Cupids. The famous gallery designed by Pompadour. Verbreck, Van Loo, Oudry, etc. An artists' paradise. Pigalle's statues. Pompadour is guarded in her letters.*

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'... she spent herself in seeking amusements for this bored Majesty ... the King yawned at everything, concerts, suppers, plays, ballets, etc. ... soon she would not know what more to do. ...' (Pompadour's words reported by D'ARGENSON. vii. 118.)

THE construction of yet another theatre was not Pompadour's chief motive in building a château at Bellevue; she feared that Louis might tire of theatricals, and hoped that the creation of a very different and perfect work of art might distract his boredom. Just as Versailles had been the background to the love of Louis XIV and Louise de La Vallière, so Bellevue witnessed the *amours* of Louis XV and the marquise de Pompadour. But alas, no trace of Bellevue was left after the Revolutionary mobs had done their worst at the close of the century—everything has been completely destroyed.

Poor Toinette grew more and more dismayed at the King's gloomy tastes: his lightest anecdotes suffered from this taint, as when he would speak at supper of the woman of

## THIEVING SERVANTS

Marseilles who had had twenty-seven children or miscarriages altogether by the time she was twenty-seven years of age. Once he insisted on reading aloud to her a sermon of Massillon, and when she expressed distaste, he went off in a pet, saying: 'Very well, I shall go to my own room and continue my reading.' Madame du Hausset tells us he would repeat the same dull story many times and Pompadour never showed weariness; she encouraged him to recount the tale of the day's hunting prowess all over again to a newcomer. How macabre he was! Du Hausset says: 'The King spoke often of death, and also of burials and churchyards: nobody had been born more melancholy. Madame told me one day that he experienced a painful sensation when he was forced to laugh, and that he had often begged her not to continue a comical story. He smiled, *et voilà tout*.'

At the beginning Louis had given his mistress an allowance of 24,000 livres every month; later this settled down to 4,000 a month; his presents, which in 1747 amounted to 50,000 livres, ceased altogether in 1750. She was beginning to acquire country houses, and kept a staff of between fifty and sixty persons, whose salaries amounted to 42,492 livres per year, not counting board, livery, fuel, travelling expenses and petty pilfering. (All servants of rich households in the eighteenth century did an enormous amount of thieving; their numberless friends and relations were always sure of titbits filched from the kitchens, and of course the servants blackmailed one another into silence.) Altogether, they cost her a million per annum. The staff included among others Collin, the famous secretary, who did her accounts, Quesnay the doctor, 'La Duhausset', as she is called (her personal maid, almost a companion, who had four others under her, not including two embroideresses), a steward, a chef with many assistants such as pastrycook, roaster and so on, a butler, an outrider, a porter, four lackeys, torch-bearers, two niggers, a *concierge*,

## BELLEVUE, OR THE LOVER'S PARADISE

a doorkeeper, three coachmen, three postilions, four grooms. And yet Pompadour insisted on calling herself poor, after the traditional manner of very rich people. In 1753 she writes: 'I am much less rich than I was in Paris. What I possess has been given me without my asking it; the expense caused by my houses has vexed me very much; it was the Master's fancy, there is nothing one can say. . . . I have never desired anything, and I defy hazard to make me unhappy; the sensitiveness of my soul alone can overcome it. I have at least this consolation of thinking that the public believes that too and does me justice.'

The public did nothing of the kind, as we shall see later. In the meantime it was lapping up the rumour spread by d'Argenson that the little Chinese theatre at Bellevue had cost 50,000 crowns, and raged accordingly.

A charming drawing of Portail's shows us the marquise in early summer paying her first visit to the rough site on the slopes of Meudon where she planned the château of Bellevue. Holding up a lace parasol with a silver barometer in the handle, she is doing the honours of the place to several friends. 'Look,' she seems to say, 'are you not *ravished* by the view of the Seine, the hillocks of St.-Cloud and the plain of Paris in the distance?' She could not have chosen a more costly site, for the soil was sandy and the foundations must be dug very deep, the gardens cut out of sloping terraces. The loiterers and vagabonds of Paris from the plain below came in their hundreds, dragging their children along with them in the true Parisian fashion; after watching the eight hundred workmen who were to be two and a half years at work, they spread false rumours in Paris to the effect that it would cost seven millions.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary engravings tell us what this elegant little palace looked like from the outside. Between the well-

<sup>1</sup> The actual cost was 2,589,714 livres.



MADAME DE POMPADOUR

From a painting by Boucher in the Wallace Collection

*Photograph : W. F. Mansell*

## EPICURE PLEASURES

proportioned windows marble busts were placed. The balconies were embellished with the emblem of the marquise—three golden towers. The decoration of the house seemed to merge harmoniously into the garden, as if the sculptor's chisel and the gardener's pruning knife had worked in happy unison.

Pompadour planned all manner of sensuous pleasures for Louis in this rustic retreat—happy days in the moist shade of a fountain made murmurous by the toy birds singing as rotating water-sprays plashed on their tails, siestas near a lilac-balmed grotto where he could see Pigalle's two carved nymphs or Coustou's marble Apollo in a bed of fritillaries and crown-imperials, delicate suppers as a change from the boring public meals of the *grand couvert*, while Jeanneton brought his favourite champagne from the pails of ice, and he could himself prepare his coffee and pour it out in one of her many delicate Dresden cups.

She would devise new dishes, such as *Filets à la Bellevue*. She smiled as she remembered the tales, recounted by old courtiers, of Louis XIV's food, lukewarm, brought in solemn procession from kitchens miles away; in winter, she planned that Louis would feast in a small, warm dining-room.<sup>1</sup> She had already ordered the laying of strawberry beds for early summer. And she would sugar cherries for him with her own fingers, and every day enhance the epicure's pleasures by wearing some new disguise and arranging fresh posies and festoons on the table.

And now to work, to work, to work! Pompadour at once turned to her favourite artist and friend, the versatile Boucher, who had already advised her on the costumes and scenery of the *théâtre des Petits Appartements*, tinted her fans and decorated her missal. Ah yes, an idea, he should paint her chapel. He only had to give wings and aureoles to his Cupids

<sup>1</sup> Antonin Carême, who was Talleyrand's cook, said: 'The long, quiet reign of Louis XV was the golden age of the best French cooking.'

## BELLEVUE, OR THE LOVER'S PARADISE

to transform them into first-class cherubim: the garlands of rosebuds they twined around the Graces would become martyrs' crowns, and once the dimples of their ravishing little *derrières* had been effaced, these overfed scamps of Ovid's decadent Olympus would adorn a Holy Family of Boucher. What a century! Any shadow of doubt which might have crossed Pompadour's mind on the subject was quickly effaced by her enthusiasm for Boucher.

But it was on the more secular *appartements* of the château that Boucher's palette lavished its gayest tints—the fashionable Chinese ornamentations of her boudoir, and above all, the gallery, her famous gallery in which several artists spilled the cornucopias of their art. Pompadour had designed it herself. Along the whole length of the walls she had commanded Verbreck to carve light garlands of flowers which other artists then coloured, and these served to frame a series of panels by Boucher. One can almost see the mincing shepherdesses with their patches at the corner of the eye, their pompoms and satins. With their flower-twined crooks, they must have resembled actresses of Pompadour's own company rather than real shepherdesses tending live sheep. On the walls of the drawing-room Van Loo painted six pictures representing Tragedy, Comedy, Painting, Sculpture, Music and Architecture. The whole interior of the house was an artists' paradise of the utmost grace and delicacy. One can imagine art connoisseurs writing exquisite monographs on the details of every door knob, every window fastening, each of which was a jewel of chased work. Around the cornices, Verbreck and Rousseau had carved Cupids and musical emblems, and symbols of love-making and country pleasures. Brunetti painted the mythological scenes on the staircase leading to the famous gallery. Uncle Tournehem, in his new capacity of Director of the Office of Works—a post for which he was extremely well fitted—had assigned the work of the door tops in the dining-

## NYMPHS AND GODDESSES

room to Oudry, and those in the music room to Pierre. For her bedroom, Van Loo had painted Pompadour as a Turkish sultanness. Adam and Falconet had peopled the antechamber with marble nymphs and goddesses; in the garden there was the statue of Louis (destroyed in the Revolution) and Pigalle's famous statues of Love and Friendship.

In a letter describing Bellevue, Pompadour wrote to her friend Madame de Lutzelbourg: 'The principal charm of the place is its delicious view. The house, though not very big, is convenient and charming, without any kind of ostentation. We perform a few comedies there.' This letter with its tone of studied casualness does not deceive us; Pompadour was always very guarded in her correspondence, for she knew that her letters might be opened by one of her enemies.



## CHAPTER XV

### SMOKY CHIMNEYS

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*The artificiality of the times. The wind playing tricks on Pompadour, everything goes wrong at the inauguration of Bellevue—rumours, fireworks, liveries, smoky chimneys, cold. Scented porcelain flowers. Preparing the guest rooms. Her monkey and parrots. The King's Angora cat. Collin makes inventory of small treasures. The King appears. Commotion and confusion. Disastrous evening. The ballet 'L'Amour Architecte'. She tires of Bellevue.*

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'Of course, even without a general idea of earth or heaven, you may make very nice poetry, you may carve delicate works of art, you may put together very curious and interesting trinkets. But in this pagan poetry, there is always, it seems to me, something wizened and hampered. For the simple flight of a butterfly you need a whole sky, you cannot understand the daisy in the grass if you do not understand the sun among the stars.' (*Ways and Crossways*, translated from PAUL CLAUDEL.)

TO the people of the eighteenth century the society of the drawing-room was their prison, Paris the limit of their horizon. In *Réflexions nouvelles sur les femmes, par une dame de la Cour* (1727) a woman writes: 'The beautiful days given by the sun are only for the common people, the only fine days for persons of refinement are to be found in the presence of those they love.' Most assuredly, whenever Pompadour looked out through her quizzing glass into the gardens and park, it was to watch some courtier or to remember that she must tell the gardeners to fill the flower-beds again, certainly not to dream about the sky and the trees. The beauty of fallen leaf she never knew, for the gardeners' boys picked

## NATURE TRIMMED TO MODISHNESS

up each leaf as it fell on the sand of the neatly raked alleys. Nature was never made the confidante of Love or Passion—that habit only became modish under Rousseau. The green shade and the green gloom, ‘le sentiment du vert’, as Sainte-Beuve so beautifully calls it, was foreign to eyes dazzled by Boucher’s brilliant little enclosed bowers ‘with their abundant disorder of pollard willows and sparkling streams wherein nymphs like *grisettes* played.’ As for the stars with their way of ensnaring man’s heart in immortality, they might just as well have been snuffed out for all that men looked on them.

On this morning of December, two and a half years later, Pompadour looked out of the window of her completed château and called Nature a flippant jade. Why had the King chosen this stormy windy time of the year for inaugurating Bellevue? She had invited Louis and their mutual friends to sup and sleep here for the first time after a day’s hunting, and every disaster that could possibly mar hospitality had befallen. She was worn out with superintending it all, the servants had caught her feverishness and forgot everything, she had been obliged to cancel her firework display because her spy had reported that a large rabble would forgather that night in the plain of Grenelle to watch it. She hoped by this to show them how irritated she was at their scoffings during the time of the building operations. Such terrible poems had been sung about her in the Paris streets: she had been called an extortionate blood-sucker, living on the life-blood of the people, an up-start woman from the gutter. Tears of rage brimmed up; she quickly wiped them away, not wishing her lids to be red or her eye shadow to melt: as it was, her eyes were very tired with dark rings under them, and her lips were bloodless. She coughed a little now and again. This was because the new chimneys smoked: why had not someone seen to that! The smoke was positively everywhere, blown by large puffs down the chimneys as if by some wind demons spiteful as the people

## SMOKY CHIMNEYS

of Paris. The walls were still suspiciously damp; in fact the only warm place seemed to be the orangery, which was heated by a porcelain stove from Germany and by some hanging lamps which she had ordered because they diffused an even heat. The purple velvet uniforms she was offering her guests had not arrived by the last coach from Lyons, and horror of horrors, she had not realized that they clashed terribly with the green liveries of her valets. As for that wretched creature Lazare Duvaux, she had ordered a large quantity of furniture in November and it was only just coming in. She went out quickly into the antechamber where Dorine was coaxing a lazy fire with bellows and the workmen were stumbling up the stairs with various pieces of furniture.

As it was winter, Pompadour had not been able to carry out her plan of filling the cornucopias in front of the white statues of Poetry and Music with columns and cones and pyramids of flame flowers, but she had told her chambermaids to do what they could with Christmas roses. What a good thing she had the scented porcelain roses and lilies from Vincennes. She smiled a little at her artful deceit and hoped that Louis would admire. 'Jeanneton,' she cried nervously, 'remember the *pot-pourri* in the bowls.'

She ordered her flunkies to carry her upstairs for a tour of inspection—her heart beat so quickly nowadays when she ran upstairs. There she found her faithful steward giving out waxen candles for the chandeliers and sand and quill pens for the writing tables; a chambermaid in *toile-de-Jour* was trotting to a small closet to fetch the delicate lace-edged sheets embroidered with three towers, and the excellent du Hausset was struggling with Pompadour's newly transported menagerie—the monkey tied by a chain to a ball, and several red and green parrots which seemed to have lost their self-command since the day that Monsieur Oudry had painted them perched up on a cherry tree, for now they were swearing to each other vigor-

## THE PET ANGORA CAT

ously in the most elegant French. 'How now, my good dame,' said Pompadour, laughing at her inability to calm the birds, 'let us be grateful that they do not screech out dreadful names as Vert-Vert did the other night to his Majesty's white Angora. He seemed to know all the worst slang of the rue Pierre-au-lard!'

'And well might the Angora have done him a great mischief that night, Madame,' replied du Hausset, stroking a pink cockatoo called Jacquot. 'His Majesty's Angora cat (whom I always call my son) had a fit of hysteria as a result of a practical joke which had been played on him not one hour previously.'

'What was that?' enquired Pompadour, busily arranging some branches of orange blossom in a crystal container.

'Well, Madame knows how gentle and affectionate he is in spite of his bulk. He never deserved the treatment he got. He was sleeping in the Council Chamber on his *cramoisi* damask cushion in the middle of the fireplace when Monsieur Dufort, who was in the room with Champcenetz [the first valet of the bedchamber], said: "It is not yet midnight: his Majesty returns in half an hour from the Petits Appartements." Champcenetz said suddenly: "I can make a cat dance for several minutes." He then poured some *mille fleurs* perfume on to the darling's paws; before very long, he woke, and feeling the effects of the spirits, he gave vent to the direst explosions, jumped on to the table, swearing, scuffling, capering, turning somersaults to the merriment of those two fellows, when suddenly—like a bomb—in burst his Majesty. He demanded an explanation. They had to confess, and his Majesty said very coldly: "Gentlemen, I leave you here, but if you want to amuse yourselves, let it be understood that it is not at my cat's expense."'

Pompadour laughed almost light-heartedly, then, feeling she was wasting time, went quickly to a closet where some priceless knick-knacks were being unpacked while Collin the

## SMOKY CHIMNEYS

steward was checking them off in his large ledger. He de-claimed in a nasal monotone:

‘One needle case in mother-of-pearl.

‘One watch case.

‘Three patchboxes in ivory with miniatures.

‘One tiny cartouche painted by le sieur Boucher, representing a shepherd declaring his love—caged birds in the foreground.’

‘My good Collin, I must look at that gem again,’ cried Pompadour. ‘Ah, he could enclose Cythera within the circle of one of Guay’s precious stones.’

Collin went into ecstasies, sharpened his quill and then sat down again to resume his inventory:

‘Two little dish warmers.

‘Nine little covered pots for cream.

‘Five little buckets in porcelain.

‘Two vases in old Chinese porcelain.

‘Another breakfast set in white porcelain and a tea box in silver gilt.

‘A little box pierced with holes for infusions.

(‘Tea is a better beverage than coffee, to be sure,’ mused Collin. ‘I always agreed with the last Madame d’Orléans, who said it was likely to create ulcers.’ He resumed:)

‘Twelve knives with green handles.

‘A little calendar in the form of a bracelet.

‘Two crystal toilet flasks.

‘Two little teaspoons in silver gilt.

‘Doubtless for Madame and his Majesty,’ he said to himself. ‘Let us hope that his Majesty will appreciate all Madame’s efforts to amuse him.’

After twilight had fallen that afternoon, Pompadour was ready waiting in her wide dress of cherry velvet with black lace underskirt, while the entire household was burning musk

## A FEAST SPOILT BY SMOKE

and amber in little containers to try and camouflage the smell of smoke. They tried not to cough. Soon she heard the sounds of his approach, and before very long the vestibule was full of hounds baying, huntsmen chattering and laughing, kitchen boys rushing through with roast pheasants and peacocks perched on their heads on silver platters, musicians of the King's household with their flutes and hautboys, harps, bassoons and clarinets. The red uniforms of his Majesty's squadrons added a most vivid splash of colour. Louis was flushed with the wind and a whole day in the open air. He was covered in mud. Pompadour stood smiling at the foot of her staircase: artifice concealed her fatigue somewhat. Louis walked towards her and kissed the pretty hand she held out for him. Suddenly his Majesty coughed—a particularly large puff of smoke had blown down the chimney—and several officers sneezed.

What a terrible evening! At dinner the smoke had become so dense that it was almost impossible to see one's neighbour at table. Louis' peevishness became visible. At length, Pompadour, almost distraught with anxiety and irritation, called two footmen, ordered them to light a wood fire immediately in her *Taudis*, a tiny house at the bottom of the garden, and set the whole household to carrying the dishes out through the wind. In half an hour everyone was laughing again at the delights of an impromptu picnic in surroundings which atoned for their simplicity by being free of smoke. Pompadour gave orders for braziers of charcoal to be carried through the principal guest chambers and for warming pans to be placed in the beds.

After that celebration, Monsieur Poisson wrote to his son in Italy: 'Yesterday your sister had a prodigious migraine; it does not surprise me, for she wears herself out to furnish and prepare everything for Bellevue.' A malicious guest—d'Argenson—said: 'The King grows more and more dissatisfied

## SMOKY CHIMNEYS

with Bellevue, where it was very cold and smoky; he was mortally bored there on the last journey; they declare that he will not return.'

The allegorical ballet which was acted in her little Chinese theatre was suitably called 'l'Amour Architecte': the ladies, peeping behind the nankeen fans which had been distributed to them as keepsakes, saw a mountain on the stage opening to the noise of thunder, and from its interior sprang the new château in the midst of dancing *jardiniers* and *jardinières*.

How sad to think that Pompadour tired of her masterpiece and sold Bellevue to Louis in 1757 to pay her debts. After her death, he gave it to Mesdames his spinster daughters, who raved about it and yet changed everything; they replaced Boucher and Van Loo by Lagrenée, Restout and Hubert Robert, and it was Pompadour's own brother, the marquis de Ménéars, who presided at the alterations of her masterpiece.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ASPS AND ADDERS

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*Her many enemies. Fears rivals. Trouble about Madame de Tallard. Hated by men. Maurepas. Psychologically warped. His hold on Louis. Famous couplet on hyacinths. Fear of poison. Rumour of miscarriage. In April 1749 Maurepas is suddenly dismissed. D'Argenson a more subtle enemy. His hold on Louis. Subterranean warfare. D'Argenson's contempt for Pompadour. He steals the comtesse d'Estrades, her intimate friend. Madame d'Estrades—her ingratitude, ugliness, sensuality, baseness, dissimulation. Spies on Pompadour in guise of friendship. Discovers that her physical relations with the King are precarious. Plot to supplant Pompadour by Madame de Choiseul outwitted by chicanery of comte de Stainville. D'Estrades thrown out for stealing a private letter. Goes to Chaillot. Undermines Pompadour's reputation. Louis' cunning and coldness. A snub from the Archbishop of Rouen.*

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*'Madame endured many tribulations in the midst of all these grandeurs. She often received anonymous letters in which people threatened to poison or assassinate her, and what upset her most was the fear of being supplanted by a rival. . . .'*

*' . . . I pity you very much, Madame, while everybody envies you.'*  
(Mémoires de Madame du Hausset, femme de chambre de Madame la marquise de Pompadour.)

When Pompadour was trying to establish her position at Court, at first her enemies seemed legion—Richelieu, the royal family, particularly the Dauphin, the servants of these people, the devout party at Court, all those women who peered at her through their lorgnettes; and how they envied her! They would grasp at any chance of being her rivals. And then came the common people, especially the *poissardes* and gutter-wenchs who



shrieked songs against her. But above all she had to contend with Maurepas, d'Argenson and finally, most treacherous of all, the comtesse d'Estrades who for a long time nurtured venomous hate against her under the guise of the tenderest friendship.

The duc de Croÿ guessed very early that Pompadour trembled at the machinations of rivals: of a masked ball given at the hôtel de Ville to celebrate the second marriage of the Dauphin<sup>1</sup> to Marie-Josèphe de Saxe in February 1747 de Croÿ writes: 'I only recognized the King by the anxiety she betrayed as she saw him passing by the benches. . . .' It made her feel that she must be tireless in drawing upon the resources of her own fascinations.

Then there came a huge storm in a tea-cup with a Madame de Tallard, lady-in-waiting to Mesdames the King's daughters. This Madame de Tallard began by flattering Pompadour, as she wanted to retain some kind of post near Mesdames. The charming Madame Henriette did not want her and begged Pompadour to ask the King to dismiss her. Pompadour did so, as she wanted to ingratiate herself with Madame Henriette. Madame de Tallard was furious and revenged herself by inventing a housemaid's story which she hoped would reach the ears of the entire royal family. By her machinations there was circulated an anonymous letter which gave one to believe that Pompadour had wanted this post for one of her own protégées in order to spy on the princesses for her own ends. Pompadour was very upset by this 'abominable calumny' and wrote a letter to the Queen's lady-in-waiting, the duchesse de Luynes: sincere devotion to her Majesty is apparent under the fulsome flatteries of the bad style. In reply the Queen sent her a few reassuring words.

<sup>1</sup> Over the bier of the Dauphiness, who had died after childbed, there had been an awful wrangle about precedence among the ladies chosen to sprinkle holy water on the corpse: they nearly came to blows.

## THE MALICE OF MAUREPAS

The next person to tackle was Maurepas. How strange it was that her most deadly enemies were men. She found them wellnigh impossible to dismiss because Louis was so often attached to them and therefore quite deaf to her complaints.

Maurepas, as one has seen by his treatment of the duchesse de Châteauroux, was the avowed enemy of all royal mistresses. Pompadour began to fear this tall thin man with the pointed chin and the malicious eyes glittering in the pale face. He had already infuriated her by imitating her rather common manners, and she, for her part, had enraged him by interrupting his interviews with the King, and by dismissing him promptly when the King looked bored. It was rumoured that he was impotent: this may have accounted for his jealousy of anyone who shared the King's confidence, for he looked upon the *amours* of his master as so many slights on his own powers of diverting him. He was minister of *Marine* and minister for Paris; Louis very much enjoyed working with him, for he turned drudgery into play with his fund of witty epigrams, feminine gossip, little songs and mimicry. Marmontel says of this warped creature: 'His eye instantly seized on what was weak and ridiculous in men, with imperceptible cunning he drew them into his snare or led them on to his purpose; with an art still more formidable he could cast ridicule on everything, even on merit itself, when he wished to undervalue it.'

One day in 1749 Maurepas ordered a poem more cruel than all the rest to be written—he probably inspired its contents—and bribed a servant to slip it under the marquise's napkin at table at Marly. It purported to refer to a bouquet of white hyacinths Pompadour had been wearing at a supper party and which had broken and scattered under her slippers; in reality it was unworthy of a gentleman, its accusation could only have been based on information bought from low kitchen scullions:

## ASPS AND ADDERS

*Par vos façons nobles et franches  
Iris, vous enchantez nos cœurs;  
Sur nos pas vous semez des fleurs,  
Mais ce ne sont que des fleurs blanches. •*

Richelieu, his confederate, took care that copies of the verses were distributed everywhere, and in twenty-four hours they were being repeated in whispers by everyone. It was useless to get Berryer, the head of police, to ferret out the culprit, for he was under Maurepas' thumb.

Pompadour suspected that Maurepas was the author, so the next day, accompanied by Madame d'Estrades, who had assumed a look of sanctimonious disgust, she went to see him. She said:

'I will not have it said of me that I have the ministers sent for; I come to fetch them.' Then, abruptly:

'When will you know the authors of these songs?' He replied with studied insolence:

'When I will know, Madame, I will tell the King.' She said—very nettled:

'You hold the King's mistresses in very small account, Monsieur.' He replied, bowing very low:

'I have always respected them, Madame, *of whatever kind they might be.*' And he looked at her very meaningly.

She rushed back to Louis and begged him to dismiss Maurepas. All in vain. So she adopted attrition tactics—so effective when dealing with idle people—and at all the King's supper parties pretended that she was very afraid of being poisoned. Did Louis not recall the rumours that Maurepas had poisoned the duchesse de Châteauroux? She ostentatiously pushed away the food prepared for her. At the *Comédie* she refused to drink anything but lemonade prepared by the hand of her surgeon. She filled the royal kitchens with her relatives to watch over the preparation of her food. She

## MORE DEADLY HATRED

had a physician sleeping near at hand during the night with an antidote. She was very bad-tempered, and Maurepas circulated rumours that she had provoked a miscarriage and was very unwell. At last Louis sickened of all this grimacing and gave in. It was made known to him how Maurepas had said: 'I bring ill luck to all of them. Everyone knows that I poisoned the duchesse.' On April 24th, 1749, Louis was laughing at the gaiety of Maurepas at his *lever*. At one in the morning of April 25th, he ordered that Maurepas be woken up and dismissed, with a dry note ending: 'Point de réponse.' He never reappeared at Court until Louis was dead. He had to expiate his lampoons very bitterly. The rhymers Desforges was sent to an iron cage on the Mont St. Michel, and lingered in a miserable condition till the abbé de Broglie obtained his release.

It has been said that Maurepas 'went away with the smile which was the mask of his whole life'; but he bequeathed to Pompadour the enmity of his colleague d'Argenson, whose passions were less voluble, but whose hatred was more deadly.

One must not confuse this d'Argenson with his brother the memoir writer. Louis was very attached to d'Argenson because he relieved him of responsibility and spared him any petty details. He swaddled Louis in the comfortable plush of flattery, never left him, and if he was kept away by an attack of gout, showered on him a perfect avalanche of little notes. Like Pompadour, he possessed the two great qualities essential both for diplomacy and subterranean warfare: patience and dissimulation. To see him with the marquise, no one would think that they were anything but the best of friends. He took her to the exhibition of pictures at the Salon in Paris, and in December 1750, at the ill-fated inauguration of Bellevue, he was the only member of the Council who was asked to spend the night at the château. D'Argenson was very

## ASPS AND ADDERS

intimate with the Queen's circle, just as Maurepas had been. In fact, the King once complained to Pompadour that some private information he'd told his wife was being discussed everywhere, and Pompadour said that it must have been repeated by d'Argenson. But she found him harder to trip up than that: he was too self-controlled, too cautious to compromise his popularity with Louis by malicious lampoons at the expense of his mistress. He had no conscience as a minister, and concealed his ambition by the stealthy, catlike tread of his strategies, by 'mealy-mouthed tyranny', as his brother called it.

D'Argenson made a show of despising Pompadour, probably because he too envied her power over Louis; he affected to relegate her to the organization of the King's pleasures, for he loathed the idea of any political interference on her side. For her part Pompadour nursed a deep malicious hatred of d'Argenson. First she tried to win over to her side his colleague Machault by pushing him forward with the King. D'Argenson revenged himself with a master stroke of diplomacy: he stole her intimate friend, the comtesse d'Estrades, and associated her with his own loathing. This ugly little female with fat red hanging cheeks became an enemy more dangerous than all the rest, because her malice was entirely unsuspected and she had access to Pompadour's confidence and intimacy at all times. Here were caressing hypocrisies, prying, peering eyes, at table, at the *toilette*, hands furtively turning over private papers and fumbling in drawers; ears listening at keyholes to conversations between Pompadour and Louis; feet running secretly to report all her gleanings to d'Argenson; tongue inventing the evil she could not find. And all the time this Judas-creature was affecting the most tender friendship.

It is difficult to account for the hatred of the comtesse: she was a relation of Pompadour's and owed everything to her.

## DANGERS OF WOMAN'S FRIENDSHIP

She was the inseparable friend who had her lodging in even the tiniest of Pompadour's country houses and was consulted for advice in all matters. It is possible that Pompadour unconsciously slighted her or hurt her pride in the manner that some women have when dealing with their less fortunate sisters; she may have made her feel the inferiority of her position and thus excited furious jealousy. Everybody whispered the story of the advances d'Estrades had made to the King one day at Choisy when she had found him in a closet a little fuddled with drink, and how she had afterwards rushed to Pompadour and made out that the King had tried to rape her. When d'Argenson heard of this he went to d'Estrades and slyly fanned all her smouldering resentment, rekindled the bitterness of protected and humiliated friendship, excited her secret desires for revenge and for a high position. He had enough finesse to win her entire allegiance.

D'Argenson's power lay in a perfectly appointed espionage system; he used this woman as a screen behind which he could make war on Pompadour. D'Estrades soon told him many things he wanted to know, and one, most important of all, that Pompadour secretly took aphrodisiacs, as she feared that the King would tire of her cold temperament.

Between them they decided to 'throw into the King's bed' a niece of d'Estrades, the young Madame de Choiseul-Romanet. First they got her invited to the supper parties of the *cabinets*. The King's roving eye was soon caught by this vivacious creature. The final decisive interview was arranged while the plotters all waited in an adjoining room. After rather a long time, Madame de Choiseul rushed in, 'dishevelled and in the disorder which was the mark of her triumph'. D'Estrades ran towards her with open arms and asked her if it was accomplished. 'Yes,' she replied, 'it is done, I am loved, he is happy; *she* will be thrown out, he has given me his word.' At this news there was an outburst of joy in the closet.

This foolish creature had spoken too soon. She had received a love-letter from the King; wishing the gift of her person to be repaid by all sorts of honours, she had consulted a relative of hers, the comte de Stainville, later duc de Choiseul, who was notorious for his contemptuous hatred of Pompadour. She showed him the King's letter. This was her undoing. He took the letter, asking her to give him till the morrow for his answer. In a flash he saw that if he committed one act of treachery, his future was assured. He went to Pompadour, and showed her the letter. One can imagine her feelings as she read it and discovered, not only the inconstancy of her lover, but also the deceit of this d'Estrades for whom she had done so much. Suddenly another suspicion assailed her. Why, she asked, had Monsieur le comte de Stainville seen fit to change his attitude towards her? He replied that he was full of respect for her, and thought her useful to the King; he had, he said, pretended to dislike her for the good of the State, but in reality he was devoted to her. So both plotted the overthrow of Madame de Choiseul.

Several days later she was thrown out '*comme une petite p*—— who had behaved badly and ogled the King'.

But Madame d'Estrades was not scotched yet: her turn came soon. Pompadour had deemed it more politic not to insist on dismissing her until she could rouse Louis' personal animosity against her; in the meantime, with that utter disloyalty which was so characteristic of him, Louis refused to have d'Estrades sent packing. Hénault said he did it to make Pompadour angry. D'Estrades employed the interim in spreading exaggerated rumours about Pompadour's extravagance, which d'Argenson in turn reported to the King. At this, Pompadour's patience snapped. Here again Fortune played into her hands and the d'Estrades gave her the opportunity of dismissing her. While ill in bed one day, she had received an important letter from the King about Parliament.

## THE SNAKE DEFTLY SCOTCHED

The letter had been left open on a little table by her bed (perhaps purposely?). D'Estrades came to visit her and fell for the bait, for after she had gone the letter was nowhere to be found.

When Louis came that evening, his mistress pretended to be furious at this violation of State secrets, this personal insult to the Monarchy, and again implored him to dismiss d'Estrades. Louis excused himself by saying that Mesdames his daughters were very fond of d'Estrades. Thereupon Pompadour, ill as she was, rushed to the proud Madame Adélaïde, whom she knew to be ill pleased at the moment with her familiar confidante, and obtained a declaration from her that 'Madame d'Estrades bored her rather'. On her return, exhausted, feverish, frantic with anxiety and suppressed rage, she put all her actress' skill into a final and supreme scene of coquetry and tears, and at last obtained the King's consent and a *lettre de cachet* exiling the comtesse from Versailles.

An hour later, having resumed a calm exterior, Pompadour invited d'Estrades with smiling courtesy to come to supper that night. Luyne tells us how d'Estrades, who wanted to go to La Meutte, asked Pompadour at what time she was to return to this supper. Pompadour replied 'At the usual hour, comtesse'. She went. Pompadour watched her go out of the room for the last time with mingled feelings. When d'Estrades got to the bottom of the Montagne des Bons-Hommes, she found a messenger who presented her with the fatal letter of dismissal.

Her lodging at Versailles was given to the comte and comtesse de Tessé. Rage and storm as she might, she could but admit that she had been paid back in her own coin. It was the quietness and dexterity of it all which baffled her. When d'Argenson received the news, he got a bad turn. When he recovered, he went to spend that same evening with his confederate. She probably accused him of landing her into this



pretty kettle of fish. It was the least he could do to rent a house for her and establish her at Chaillot on the road to Versailles, within reach of all his friends. They consoled themselves by raking up all the filthiest stories about the private life of Pompadour and undermining her reputation in the societies of Versailles and the houses of Paris, in promoting pamphlets and surrounding her with a thousand whisperings. Little did either of these two know of the disasters they were hatching for the next generation by this degradation of the respect due to royalty. Could they have seen the *princesse de Lamballe*, for example, disembowelled in the streets by a horde of furies, or could they have heard the screams of the *du Barry* at the guillotine, they might have paused a moment.

Pompadour had at last a little respite, a measure of security. No more the fear of a slimy track left by an invisible snake. Did she once ask herself whether her royal lover was worth all this fighting? One day she said to *du Hausset* that she envied the lot of *Louise de La Vallière*! Again she said to her—concerning a *Madame de Coislin* who was trying to oust her in the King's affections: 'You don't know him, my good dame; if he were planning to put her this very evening in my suite of rooms he would treat her coldly before the world and lavish on me the greatest signs of friendship. Such has been his upbringing. . . .'

And *d'Argenson* still remained at large. She would never feel safe until he was dismissed. He was forever spreading rumours about the decline of her beauty, which naturally gave other women reason to hope that her post at Court might soon be vacant. He touched her on her most sensitive spot: 'The marquise changes every day until she is only a skeleton; the bottom half of her face is yellow and shrivelled; as for the bosom, it exists no more.' It was the insecurity of her position which aged her more than anything else. But *d'Argenson's* hour would come.

## SNUB FROM AN ARCHBISHOP

At about this time Pompadour received her first slight from a high ecclesiastic. The King was planning to take her on a journey to Havre to see the ships. The expenses were heavy on the towns and estates chosen to give hospitality on the way. Louis told the Archbishop of Rouen that he wanted to break his journey at his residence at Gaillon. His Grace made a profound bow, and seeing that Charity and Truth could not here be reconciled, took refuge in silence. Louis repeated: 'Did you hear that I am going to pay you a visit?' His Grace again bowed and uttered no word. At length Louis exploded: 'No, Monsieur, I would rather be hanged than accept your hospitality!'

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE MARQUISE AT HER DRESSING TABLE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS, PHILOSOPHERS AND AUTHORS

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*The bedchamber of the marquise. Her bath, lever and toilette. Cosmetics. Visitors—authors, artists, philosophers and nobles. Malice. Marmontel's asp. Buffon on passion. Parfiler. The Queen's skull. Powdering her hair. Conti's insolence. Scourges and hair shirts. Why Pompadour patronized art and letters. Louis dislikes authors. The circle of Quesnay. Pompadour frivolous yet kind. Only polite when necessary. Spongers. Lack of literary discrimination. Women at the theatre. Crébillon. Voltaire. Base ingratitude. Fawning flattery of Voltaire. Rousseau at Court, uncombed. La Nouvelle Héloïse. Nattier. Cochin. Boucher. Greuze. La Tour's study of Pompadour. His genius and eccentricity. The portrait in the Louvre.*

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*'Thus all those who have left the Church have not been able to avoid the characteristic which, according to St. Paul, belongs to the false doctors, that is: To acquire learning, without ever attaining to the knowledge of the Truth.'* (BOSSUET. *Histoire des Variations*. Livre 15.)

*'You destroy all errors, but what do you put in their place?'* (MADAME DU DEFFAND to Voltaire.)

At eleven o'clock on a Sunday morning in late autumn, the marquise awoke in her new suite of rooms on the ground floor at Versailles. Sunlight filtered dustily through an opening of the heavy damask curtains and touched her wrinkled lids. A scratch at the door, and Dorine followed by the poodle tripped in carrying a high cup of hot chocolate. A bevy of maids kindled a wood fire in the grate.

## POMPADOUR HAS A BATH

Dorine put down the cup on a little table by the bed and drew the curtains. She said gaily:

'*Bonjour*, Madame, I trust Madame has had a better night'

'Ah Dorine, a dreadful night, dreadful.'

Another scratch. Two footmen in blue habits stumbled in bearing the rose porcelain bath steaming with warm milk and amber essence. Pompadour sipped her chocolate. The screen was unfolded, Dorine placed tiny mules on her mistress' feet and assisted her into her bath. After a time two undermaids, very cheerful and pretty, with deft, noiseless movements helped her out again and wrapped her in a robe of warm white flannel in which she reclined for a time before the fire in her chaise-longue. Two more *soubrettes* were making up the bed with clean sheets, dusting the trinkets, bringing in fresh bowls of flowers. Pompadour was put into her fresh chemise, three under-petticoats, fine silk stockings and over it all a frilly blue morning jacket cascading with Valenciennes and garlanded with forget-me-nots and roses. She seated herself at the dressing table near the window. The most famous description of an eighteenth-century dressing table has been given by the de Goncourts: 'In the woman's bedchamber the triumphal piece of furniture is this table with its mirror; it is adorned with laces like an altar, swathed in foaming muslin like a cradle, encumbered with philtres and fineries, paints, pastes, patches, scents, vermilion rouge, vegetable rouge, mineral rouge, chemical white, blue for veins, Maille vinegar against wrinkles; and the ribbons, and the tresses and aigrettes; bewitching little world of coqueties, of a century fragrant with amber in a cloud of powder!' And about the woman looking in the mirror (untranslatable passage): 'Elle est friande, elle est charmante, ramassée dans son corset avec cet aimable désordre et cet air chiffonnée du déshabillé du matin.'

Pompadour was no sooner seated before her mirror and

## THE MARQUISE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS

being laced tightly into her bodice than she heard a noise like a monkey house outside her door; above it all Dorine's voice was repeating: 'It is not yet daylight at Madame's.' But she could not stem the invasion. First a conceited-looking hair-dresser, comb in hand, began undoing the edifice he had erected two weeks before, while Pompadour relieved the itching of her head by means of an ivory hand on the end of a stick. Then followed the physician Quesnay, who came to feel his patient's pulse and order a sedative; and close on his heels the abbé de Bernis, who had just heard Mass, holding a sheaf of new poems in honour of the marquise. The engravings of the time show us that tradespeople of all kinds were admitted at this hour to display their wares—a sailor offered a new parrot, a flower-girl opened baskets of perfumes, sweetmeats and posies, the fashionable modiste displayed silks and rustling satins out of the pink-ribboned oblong boxes which were carried in by her attendant *midinette*. 'What does the abbé think?' said Pompadour languidly, as she hesitated in the choice of two pieces of frippery.

Soon the room became so crowded that the vendors had to go in order to give place to the duc de Croÿ, come to ask for promotion; Monsieur de Gontaut, a close friend who fluttered in a cloud of anecdotes, humming the latest ditty; the ugly comte de Stainville, affecting passionate devotion, pirouetting on one high red heel as he cut out a patch with golden scissors; Voltaire, looking out of temper because old Crébillon was there; then Diderot, d'Alembert; Boucher, jolly and prosperous, the pleasant smiling Marmontel; Montesquieu and Duclos in new white silk stockings, trying to look at ease among the courtiers with their *cordons bleus*. Such a *toilette*! Indeed it had been maliciously likened to the famous 'unbreeching' of the cardinal de Fleury. Duclos was welcomed with a brief and light 'Bonjour, Duclos', Bernis with a 'Bonjour, abbé' accompanied by a little tap, Marmontel was

## VOLTAIRE AND THE ASP

greeted with a more serious and profound 'Bonjour, Marmontel'.

Marmontel was a cautious creature where women were concerned: he once said, 'But with those who you think will be useful to you, be careful to be nothing but their *friend*.' He was greatly in Pompadour's debt as she had supported him through two plays which had been failures.

'Monsieur de Marmontel,' said Voltaire, who was always jealous when anyone tried to write for the theatre, 'how was it that the success of your play *Cléopâtre* did not rise to your expectations?'

In the sudden hush which followed this shaft, Marmontel replied imperturbably: 'As for that, Monsieur Voltaire, I can give a very good explanation. That wretch Vaucanson made me a mechanical asp for Cleopatra in the last scene and it hissed at the wrong moment so that everybody laughed instead of weeping.'

There was a titter of mirth, while Voltaire whispered to Monsieur de Gontaut: 'If I were asked what I thought of the play, I should reply, "I was of the asp's opinion."'

'My poor Marmontel,' said Pompadour, laughing, 'we must ask Monsieur Buffon to make you a proper, natural asp. Is he here this morning?'

'No, Marquise,' said the duc de Croÿ, flicking a little snuff from his spotless jabot, 'he is with Her Majesty to-day.'

Pompadour frowned. She had never succeeded in making the great Buffon an *habitué* at her *toilette* because he was devoted to the Queen.

'I must scold him severely,' she said lightly, applying a little blue on her eyelids from a mussel shell. 'In his *Histoire Naturelle* he said that in love the physical element alone is of importance. I must tell him to cross out this foolish sentence from his next edition. Give me my doll, Dorine.'

## THE MARQUISE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS

Everyone in the room shuffled a little uncomfortably at this bit of unconscious self-revelation. Since when had the divine marquise become a believer in Platonic friendship?

Pompadour concealed her pique at Buffon's absence by playing with her doll, which, although dressed as a nun, had great spots of rouge on its cheeks. It belonged to her little girl Alexandrine, now at Versailles for a time, and the kind du Hausset had put on its wimple a strip of that new *parfilage* the making of which was the fashionable pastime of the moment.

'A pretty piece of *parfilage*, is it not?' she said, turning to Boucher.

'What is *parfiler*?' asked Diderot.

Voltaire looked round and said: 'Monsieur, the equivalent of that word is not found in Cicero. It is to unravel a piece of material, to unpick it thread by thread and pluck out the gold threads; that is what Newton did with the rays of the sun, and a certain man named Locke has done as much to human understanding.'

'We are all becoming too metaphysical,' said Pompadour, stifling a yawn. 'I dislike this modish seriousness: it ill becomes a social being to hide all day in his laboratory making experiments; it is like her Majesty meditating on higher things and the futility of human affairs by gazing at that skull on her escritoire.'

'Mon Dieu', said d'Alembert, 'she would not call it "La Belle Mignonne" as she does, if she knew that it had belonged to Ninon de Lenclos.'

Pompadour looked icy at the mention of that lady of doubtful virtue. 'Sh . . . Sh . . . !' whispered Diderot to d'Alembert, 'don't you know that the marquise does not like ladies of *that* kind to be spoken of in her presence?'

Fortunately a diversion was caused by a sudden flurry of maids around the marquise: Dorine shrouded her in a long

## SCOURGES AND HAIR SHIRTS

powdering coat, she gave her a mask to hold against her face, the circle of devotees was requested to stand a little farther back, and two *soubrettes* dusted the edifice of the marquise's hair with blue-white powder blown from special bellows. Soon everybody was choking and coughing.

Just then that insolent dandy, the prince de Conti, came in. He always made it *quite* clear to her that he was *not* going to discuss private affairs of State with her; he had also excluded her from an invitation to Chantilly. She was therefore always glad when anyone referred to the day when her friend Madame de la Ferté-Imbault had bitten the hand which he had held out for her to kiss.

He bowed coldly, pretended to stifle a large yawn, looked in vain for a stool—for Pompadour like royalty kept everybody standing. At last he espied the downy bed and calmly sat on it, saying flippantly:

'Ah, here is a good enough perch.'

There was a suppressed gasp of amazement from the assembly and Pompadour stiffened and tried to stare him out of countenance, but to no avail: he slowly helped himself to snuff, shut the box with a decisive snap and, taking no more notice of her than if she had been a fly on the ceiling, exclaimed: 'Well, do you know the latest?'

'Tell us, tell us,' they all cried, while Pompadour turned her back to him and started fumbling noisily among the delicate eggshell-tinted pots.

The prince began: 'Do you know what was found in a box near the bed of the chevalier de Montaigne, Monsieur le Dauphin's *menin*, who died the other day?'

'What?' they all cried eagerly.

'Hair shirts, iron girdles and scourges red with blood!' he announced dramatically.

'How misguided,' muttered Voltaire.

'I agree with you,' said Diderot. 'I always said that the



## THE MARQUISE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS

Christian religion was barbarous. We are now entering upon a more enlightened era when man will burst asunder the chains of superstition.'

'Hush, my good man,' said the prince de Conti with delicate mockery, 'you will be offending our friend the ascetic duc de Croÿ over there, who always keeps the fasts and abstinences of the Church and is probably at the moment wearing a hair shirt himself.'

'I think man has lost his dignity,' said de Croÿ calmly. 'I firmly believe in the effects of original sin and my certainty on this point has been strengthened by my observations of human beings. Who amongst us here, for example, would not willingly do his neighbour a mischief to secure his own advantage?'

'Fie, what uncomely sentiments,' cried Pompadour impatiently. 'And now, Messieurs,' she said, bowing very graciously, 'I must implore you to excuse me, for his Majesty will be here at any moment. . . .'

Pompadour had assumed the role of supreme patroness of arts and letters. Assured by the reflection in her mirror that beauty vanishes, she was devoured by a desire for immortality. There were other reasons: she liked to set the natural aristocracy of intellectual people against the boring snobbishness of some great ladies at court; and men of letters celebrated her beauty, extolled her wit, defended her against her enemies, showered ironical pamphlets on the devout party—the circle of the Dauphin, Bishop Boyer, Jesuits, bishops and confessors. It had become the craze among idle women to scatter serious treatises, as if by chance, on their knick-knack tables. Literary culture was in the air for women of the upper classes; many of them thought profoundly about human life, wrote their memoirs and collected books for their libraries and boudoirs; they were painted surrounded with maps, musi-

## DANGEROUS PHILOSOPHERS

cal instruments and books. Pompadour was swept by the tide of her century.

Louis did not share her enthusiasm for men of letters: he found them quarrelsome and pretentious, and he was frankly alarmed by their anti-religious tendencies. As for the *Encyclopédistes*—he rather wished his mistress would not be so friendly towards them; for Bishop Boyer had warned him that they were very dangerous people indeed.

There is a well-known anecdote of Voltaire's, based on the report of a *valet-de-chambre*, which purports to show how the banished volumes of the *Encyclopédie* made their way back to Court after a supper party at Trianon at which Louis and Pompadour were conversing with a few members of their intimate circle. The dates of Voltaire's report are inaccurate, and we cannot accept it as historical evidence.

Her household physician and great friend Quesnay was a link between her and the philosophers; a theoretical economist himself, he entertained in his lodging at Versailles such famous men as Diderot, d'Alembert, Duclos, Helvétius, Turgot and Buffon. The members of this little hotbed, with their hatred of authority, met in the very seat of the Monarchy itself.

Quesnay, who had won favour by his prompt rescue of Louis from a violent colic in the middle of the night, was a peasant from the Danube. He was one of those people, more common as the century advanced, who got their livelihood from the Monarchy and yet played the republican: 'rough Democrats in appearance, supple in reality, who eat with pride the good dinners of the great ones of the earth'. Louis had given him a crest one day by handing him three pansies from a vase on the mantelpiece, saying: 'Here are speaking emblems.' He was a good physician and understood very well the constitution and temperament of the marquise his patient. The philosophers who forgathered in his rooms would never

## THE MARQUISE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS

go to Pompadour: she had to come and see them. Duclos was once heard to say there, speaking of the nobles who flattered him: 'They fear us just as thieves fear street lanterns.' Madame du Hausset quotes a saying of La Rivière: 'The kingdom cannot be regenerated save by some great interior upheaval, but woe to those who will be involved in it! The French people know no half measures.'

Diderot and his friends probably scoffed at Pompadour's pretensions to philosophy, but she was useful to them. Although Louis had not dared to grant her request and revoke the Edict of 1752 suppressing the *Encyclopédie*, yet Grimm tells us that she and several ministers joined in asking Diderot and d'Alembert to resume work on it.

It was not from love of philosophy that Pompadour favoured the *Encyclopédistes*, nor even for the pleasure of being called the Egeria of Letters, but simply because these men furthered her own private revenges. They were the violent enemies of the Jesuits who thwarted her ambitions, the declared foes of that Archbishop of Paris who had snubbed her and who had been heard to say he would like to see her burn; they made fun of that rigid Bishop Boyer who had so violently opposed her establishment at Versailles.

The abbé de Bernis comments on Pompadour as a patroness with a justice exempt from resentment: 'The marquise had none of the big vices of ambitious women; but she had all the trifling frivolity and heedlessness of women who have a very good opinion of their appearance and superior intellect. She did wrong without being malicious and good because of a passing craze; her friendship was jealous like love, light, inconstant like love, and never assured.'

So great was her influence over taste and opinion that she could start a furore with a smile. Marmontel relates how he came to her *toilette* one day holding the manuscript of a play in his hands; he found the marquise very jaded; she decided to

## THE FRIENDLESS RICH

use the excuse of a private conversation with him to go into a neighbouring closet for a moment's rest. She said: 'I have something to say to you,' and took him out. She had merely returned a manuscript of his with pencilled marks on it, but when they came back to the bedchamber, everyone greeted him with nods and smiles and enough invitations were showered on him to keep him well fed for a week. A nobleman whom he had met only once said to him: 'Won't you speak to your old friends?'

At the beginning of her career, Pompadour had found it necessary to be always 'obliging, engaging', as de Croÿ so often remarks in his memoirs; but when her position was secure, 'knowing all her people, she was a little more decided and less obliging, but always polite enough and seeking to give pleasure or at least appearing to do so.' She grew disillusioned as she found that people paid their court not for herself but merely for what she could do for them. The aloof de Croÿ himself says on one occasion that he had not visited her for some time, 'not having any request to make'.

But if courtiers and philosophers were troublesome, she helped writers in memory of her young days. She said once to the président de Malesherbes: 'I love talent and letters, and it will always be a great pleasure for me to contribute to the happiness of those who cultivate them.'

There is an instance in which the hidden kindness of her heart showed on behalf of an untalented person who could be of no use to her: when she was told that a woman living in Paris in great poverty was a distant relative of hers, she dispatched money to relieve her immediate necessities while she made enquiries about her. Pompadour then sent for her to come to Versailles, where she received her very kindly and gave her an annuity. For a woman who had never known want this is quite remarkable.

Sometimes her kindness could be divorced from the dis-

## THE MARQUISE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS

crimination needed for literary patronage. When she heard that her old master had fallen on evil days she exclaimed, 'What, Crébillon poor and without means!' and sent for him at once. She heard the reading of his piece *Catalina* and encouraged him to finish it. She promised to sponsor a performance of it at the *Comédie Française* and also to arrange for a finely printed edition of his works—a favour Voltaire had never been able to obtain. She reminded the King that Louis XIV had resurrected the old and forgotten Corneille at Versailles. At the performance of *Catalina*, 'never had the Roman Senate looked more coquettish on the stage with its togas of silver cloth edged with purple'. The enemies of Voltaire helped to make the play a success, fashion dictated the applause, the *salons* were in a flutter about it, boxes were booked up for three months ahead. The presence of the Court, the interest of the King, and the bravos of Pompadour lent the piece an illusion of triumphal success. Soon it was quite forgotten and people ceased to compare the astonished Crébillon to Sophocles. But Voltaire never forgot. He started at once to write a *Catalina* called *Rome Sauvée*. Strange power of woman in that age, when her applause saved a tragedy on the brink of failure, while a yawn might kill a comedy about to succeed!

We have seen how Voltaire's noisy and indiscreet flatteries in the first year of her favour did Pompadour nothing but harm. Later, when he heard she was to play the part of Lise in his *Enfant Prodigue*, another shower of poems was released:

*Ainsi donc vous réunissez  
Tous les arts, tous les goûts, tous les talents de plaire:  
Pompadour, vous embellissez  
La Cour, le Parnasse et Cythère.  
Charme de tous les cœurs, trésor d'un seul mortel,  
Qu'un sort si beau soit éternel!*

## LOUIS' DISLIKE OF VOLTAIRE

*Que vos jours précieux soient marqués par des fêtes!  
Que la paix de nos champs revienne avec Louis!  
Soyez tous deux sans ennemis,  
Et tous deux gardez vos conquêtes.*

Then followed a poem addressed to Pompadour on the capture of Berg-op-Zoom:

*... Et vous et Berg-op-Zoom, vous étiez invincibles!  
Vous n'avez cédé qu'à mon roi,  
Ils volent dans vos bras du sein de la victoire;  
Le prix de ses travaux n'est que dans votre cœur,  
Rien ne peut augmenter sa gloire,  
Et vous augmentez son bonheur.*

The Court was shocked by this comparison between the military and amatory conquests of the monarch. Voltaire had gone a little too far this time. He was acclaimed by . . . universal silence. His departure to Cirey and then to Lunéville had all the appearance of a flight. Though he could not claim the honour of exile, he knew better than to appear again at his lodging in the south wing of Versailles.

Louis not only feared him with reason as a destructive agent but disliked him personally for his avidity, his vanity, his touchiness, his jealousy of his fellow writers. Louis was not blind to treachery in others, and once when a courtier thought to please him by showing pleasure at a friend's disgrace, Louis quietly said: 'And the cock crowed.' Pompadour's brother writes: 'Voltaire's crotchet has always been to become an ambassador, and he did all he could to make people believe that he was entrusted with a political mission when he went to Prussia for the first time.' This appeared unbecoming and ridiculous to Louis.

Voltaire was full of anxious contradictions, extreme both in flattery and ingratitude. When Pompadour made no effort to

## THE MARQUISE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS

get him back to Versailles, he wrote *La Pucelle*, wherein the patroness who had been hymned as 'la divine d'Étioles' was referred to as a 'lucky *grisette*'. The offending verses were omitted in the edition of 1762.

Voltaire's pride was soothed a little when he was commissioned to write a *Panegyrique de Louis XV* on the occasion of the conclusion of war. Pompadour was presented with a copy in blue morocco stamped with the royal arms and decorated with laces. In his capacity of royal historiographer, he analysed the treaty which brought the war to an end. He showed the manuscript to Pompadour; it concluded with these extraordinary lines, concerning the peace: 'One will learn with surprise that it was the fruit of the pressing counsels of a young lady of the highest rank, renowned for her charms, her singular talents, her intelligence and the enviable place she occupies.' Pompadour, thus immortalized, owned that this time Voltaire had surpassed Crébillon, and on May 27th, 1749, he was suitably rewarded.

Later, when the rumour went round that Voltaire had a hand in the insulting verses composed by Frederick the Great against Pompadour, he wrote to Choiseul indignantly exculpating himself. Pompadour asked Choiseul to send him a message: 'La marquise de Pompadour has asked me to send you a thousand kind messages from her . . . [she] loves you with all her heart, she says so all the time.' We will see later on how secure their reconciliation was to be. She felt a little ill at ease with Louis when the news reached her that street hawkers were selling the portrait of her protégé in the streets of Paris, crying raucously: 'Portrait of Voltaire, that famous Prussian, two sous, the famous Prussian.' Why had he fled so treacherously to that Frederick who said dreadful things about her?

Pompadour's relations with Rousseau were no less tempestuous: he came to watch the last rehearsal of *Le Devin du Village*, 'bashful as a schoolboy' before the brilliant actresses

## ROUSSEAU INSULTS POMPADOUR

from the Opéra. He affected to despise the conventions in the manner of many revolutionaries. He tells us the story in his *Confessions*. He appeared with a great beard rather badly combed and was put in a box right in front of Louis and the marquise. When the candles were lit, he was seized with the morbid fear lest he had been put there to be made a spectacle before the assembled Court, and he started on his tortuous lucubrations: 'My external appearance is simple and negligent, not filthy and dirty. . . .'

As a matter of fact the astonishment with which the audience was gazing at him and his play was entirely devoid of malice: he was not armed against the caressing air, the whispered gushings of these ladies who were as beautiful as angels: 'How utterly charming, how quite ravishing, there is not a single sound which does not go straight to the heart,' they cried. So he began to weep into his beard. He confesses that 'the pleasure of the sex had a great deal more part in it than the author's vanity. . . .'

The duc d'Aumont told him to be at the château at eleven o'clock the next morning to be presented to the King. Rousseau spent a frightful night, tortured by apprehension lest his 'fréquent besoin de sortir' which had tormented him at the play should seize him in the King's presence. And how could he accept the pension he knew the King would offer him 'without departing from the severe demeanour' which was part of the philosopher's livery? What would his friends think of him, and . . . would the pension be paid regularly?

The next day he had fled the scene. He consoled himself by thinking that the King hummed all day the ariettas of the *Devin du Village* with a voice which was very out of tune. Pompadour laughed, called him 'the owl', sent him fifty louis and forgave him. When Rousseau wrote *La Nouvelle Héloïse* he vented his spleen by saying that 'the wife of a coal merchant was more worthy of respect than the mistress of a king'.



## THE MARQUISE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS

He was hastily told to alter the word 'king', but, alas, by substituting the word 'prince' he offended Madame de Luxembourg, a friend of the princesse de Conti his benefactress. When Pompadour was asked what she thought of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* she replied that she did not much care for it, in fact she had not summoned enough patience to finish it, and as for Julie, she found her an insipid creature.

The marquise was more fortunate as a patroness in the domain of art. In that age, though artists had long apprenticeships, they did not starve when they started to work, and if a painter flattered his women models he was sure to be the rage. Nattier had painted Pompadour in the early days, but he was a little outmoded now, since he had descended to painting all the rich *bourgeoises* of Paris dressed as goddesses. Cochin had been her friend since the time he had gone with her brother Abel on the artist's grand tour in Italy, that fascinating journey which was to prepare him to succeed Uncle Tournement as director of the royal office of works. Abel had exquisite taste and discernment; but his sister's preference had a great deal of influence on the building and redecorating schemes in which he was always engaged.

As for Boucher, he was always her friend. In 1753 she had bought the magnificent pair of pictures<sup>1</sup> 'Le Lever du Soleil' and 'Le Coucher du Soleil' after they had been exhibited at the Salon, and as she was a little embarrassed for money at the time, he had accepted only smiles and thanks for payment. He designed her furniture, painted her fans, and they discussed together at great length all her artistic plans. Diderot might storm for ever; she was faithful to Boucher with all the sympathy of a kindred spirit. We are told by critics that Boucher lacks that *signe de race* of all great artists—that his signature is an 'elegant vulgarity', that his nymphs are 'genre canaille'.

<sup>1</sup> Now in the Wallace Collection.

## BOUCHER'S FRIENDSHIP

One must not forget that he was a little led astray, like many others in his century, by the demands of industrial art; his directorship of the Gobelins tapestries tended to make him into a decorator because he was hampered by having to subject his harmonies to the exigencies of silk and wool, thus sacrificing the subtleties of shade to a constant gaiety. One must acknowledge gratefully—What a decorator, what warmth, what colour, what enjoyment of the present hour!

Boucher's friendship was refreshingly disinterested compared with Voltaire's. He was too generous to be jealous of his fellow artists and gave sketches, advice and financial aid very lavishly to all the young men who flocked so eagerly around his easel. Like Pompadour, he was an avid collector of small objects: many a time he brought to her the latest treasures he had purchased—his amethysts and crystals full of strange fires, his Siberian malachites, his corals, his alabaster and his collection of beautiful sea shells. . . . Both of them loved that eighteenth-century land of Caprice, China, with its jades and porcelains. He was blamed by all his contemporaries for making China, at the instigation of Pompadour, a province of Rococo.

One does not know whether it is true that he painted the celebrated Morphise as the Virgin in a Holy Family for the Queen's oratory, in order to excite the King's lust by her beauty. It seems rather improbable, but a series of erotic pictures by Boucher, now lost, were known once; at the time of the *Empire* they were hidden in a corner of a royal château. In this respect, Boucher was of his time: truly has it been said of him that he has 'lived spacioously and gaily', that he came to his studio 'from a *parti de femmes*'. Full-blooded and exotic he may have been, but vulgarity is not the keynote of his art.

The sale catalogue of some of Pompadour's possessions and pictures tells us that she owned Chardin's 'Picture of a

## THE MARQUISE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS

woman playing on a bird organ [*serinette*] to amuse her canary', but as Chardin was principally the painter of the *bourgeoisie*, it is not likely that Pompadour was greatly interested in him. She chose her still-life pictures from Jean de Heem and Bachelier, among others. We find also that she had 'L'Accordée du Village' and 'Le Coucher de la Mariée' by Greuze. But on this fascinating subject one could talk for ever.

La Tour, who was one of the many artists to paint her, was not so amenable as Boucher. This charming eccentric once said: 'My models believe that I only discern the features of their faces, but unknown to them, I probe down to their innermost being.' In virtue of his penetration, La Tour saw right through his distinguished sitter and did not like what he found. He was devoted to the Queen and his portrait of her is a masterpiece of unstudied grace. Not so with Pompadour. One should see the study, preserved at St. Quentin, which he made in preparation for his big official portrait of her: it is extremely disillusioning, for he painted with cruel realism the ravages of ill health and the common expression of a *bourgeoise*.

Pompadour found it difficult to get La Tour to come to Versailles and paint her. He refused at first. In the end, he came on condition he was not to be disturbed; and woe betide the model who made suggestions—he put the truth of his art above the caprices of his clients. He came. Bucelly d'Estrées describes him: 'Maurice was physically weak in appearance . . . his bearing was firm and decided. He carried his head high, his eye was bright, the oval of his face well shaped, his lips narrow; fastidious in his dress, he was of exquisite cleanliness.' Before painting, he hung up his coat, threw off his braces, donned an old cap. In this unconventional garb he was surprised by the King, who started laughing; La Tour was so irate that he rushed out of the room, and it needed a lot of



MADAME DE POMPADOUR

From a painting by Maurice Quentin de La Tour in  
the Louvre

*Photograph : W. F. Mansell*

## LA TOUR'S PENETRATION INTO WOMEN

diplomacy to get him back at all. His conversation with high personages was a medley of disarming impertinence and political propaganda. He boasted of going to Court only to tell truths to 'those folk there'. The well-born, in their usual way, pronounced these eccentricities charming. When he was painting Louis XV he was given a room which was very unsuitable because the light came in from all sides. The King said he had chosen it for greater privacy. La Tour said: 'I did not know, Sire, that you were not the master in your own house.' When La Tour was nearing eighty, he left his lodging at the Louvre to live at Auteuil. Whenever Louis passed that way, he always sent for news of him.

With the Dauphin he was no less incorrigible, for hearing that he had been wrongly informed about certain happenings, he said: 'That is typical of the way you are always allowing yourselves to be deceived by swindlers, you others.'

La Tour is most certainly the greatest portrait painter of the eighteenth century. It has been said that the eyes of his models seem to follow you round the room; you feel as if you had surprised a closet full of people who had just stopped talking—'le dix-huitième qui causait'. With the greater subtlety which pastels give, he has glimpsed the unspoken shades of meaning in woman's face as never before, he has brushed lightly over the caress of a thought; it is to him alone that we owe the surprising revelation of that mid-century face, emerging from the harshness of the *Régence* type—the intelligent eyes, the determined lips, the haunting combination of finesse and shrewdness.

La Tour's famous portrait of the marquise, now in the Louvre, was exhibited in 1755. She has an air of complaisance rather than of gentleness, 'the look of a queen which she has had to assume through circumstances, but which she retains without too much effort.' Probably she would have been less satisfied had she seen the cruel study of the head which La

## THE MARQUISE PRESIDES OVER ARTISTS

Tour had made in preparation for this great portrait. What irony! She saw only this deceptive masterpiece which portrayed her at the zenith of her power and which should be entitled 'Marquise de Pompadour, Patroness of Arts and Letters'.

PART III

CURFEW

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE DIAL DARKENS

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*Queen discovers statue of Friendship. Physical break caused by Pompadour's ill health. Her looks suffer. Chest. Leeching. Miscarriages. Heart attacks. Exhaustion. Dangerous cosmetics and foods of the time. Aphrodisiacs. Couches. Cleverness at remaining in favour. Plans to be devout if necessary to her position. New suite of rooms. King satisfies his passions by shameful seductions. Never performs Easter duties. Pompadour's tactics. Le Bel turns pander. St. Teresa's vision of Hell. Parc aux Cerfs. Origin. Legends about orgies and expenditure. Description. La Morfil. Attempts to make her into a lady stopped by her pregnancy. Confinements in avenue de St. Cloud. Sad incident. Pompadour assists Louis in a difficult moment. The lovely Mademoiselle de Romans. House at Passy. Pompadour spies on her and baby boy. Profits by her indiscreet babbling. Boy traced in Louis XVI's reign. Pompadour made duchesse. Dauphin's rudeness. Her privileges.*

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*'In every place where there are human beings, my dear brother, you will find deceit and every vice of which mortals are capable. To live by oneself, however, would be very monotonous, so one must endure them along with their faults and pretend not to notice them.'* (Letter of MARQUISE DE POMPADOUR to her brother.)

One autumn day Marie Leczinska was walking in solitude in the gardens of Bellevue, which she was visiting during an absence of the marquise, when she saw a beautiful statue shining against the dark green of a cypress grove. She put on her spectacles, which her dear friend de Luynes had given her, and looked with admiring curiosity at Pigalle's<sup>1</sup> white goddess in her graceful draperies;

<sup>1</sup> After Pompadour's death Pigalle bought back his statue, which he kept till 1780, when he sold it to the prince de Condé. It was confiscated



## THE DIAL DARKENS

one hand was on her heart and the other she held out in a gesture of invitation. A gardener near by was sweeping up the dead leaves. She asked him:

‘What is the name of this bower?’

He looked up and replied:

‘Madame, it was once called the “Grove of Love”, but now it is known as the “Grove of Friendship”.’

Marie Leczinska turned away with the disillusioned smile which had become the mask of her many bitter years.

The physical break which Pompadour had both dreaded and desired took place at the end of 1751. For six years she had borne uncomplainingly ‘les fatigues de l’amour sans plaisir’, but towards the end the moan of disgust and exhaustion could be stifled no longer.

Her health had always been frail. De Croÿ, de Luynes and d’Argenson comment on her numerous colds, migraines, colics, miscarriages. She endured the martyrdom of the age, sleeplessness, that first sign of nervous instability; her nerves were easily shaken in spite of the enormous efforts she made to control them, and her various indispositions played such havoc with her looks that her *toilette* became a despairing effort to repair damage. From her young days she had coughed blood. She had been able to live on a milk diet and to rest in the country when the King was away at the wars, but when he returned . . . she was constantly shaken up, in cold draughty coaches, on dusty roads, rushing about from one royal residence to another. She seemed to live in a whirl of heavy colds, of days spent in bed recovering from a temperature and from being leeched. Among her letters there are by the *Directoire* and placed in the Luxembourg. When the Bourbons came back in 1814 Condé’s possessions were returned but the statue could not be found. In 1879 a certain Waddington, Minister for Foreign Affairs, identified it: it was hardly recognizable, having spent many years in the gardens of the Palais Bourbon.

## CONTINUAL ILL-HEALTH

many like the following, dated May 20th, 1751, from Marly, which the Queen said was the coldest, sootiest place in the world:

'I have rather a heavy cold which has given me a temperature for twenty-four hours. It is a little better. I go down to the drawing-room this evening (which is diabolical for colds, it is terribly hot in there and icy when you go out and one hears more coughing than at Christmas).'

But she had to carry on as usual. It is recorded that she acted in some private theatricals when her voice was hoarse with cold.

There is a pretty detail in her accounts published by Monsieur Le Roy: '6,000 livres given by Louis XV, June 1761, to reward her for allowing herself to be bled.' On April 2nd, 1749, Luynes writes:

'Madame de Pompadour has been unwell for the last two or three days and one does not see her. One heard yesterday that this indisposition is a miscarriage; I was told that it was at least the third she has had since she has been here.'

Her heart began to feel the strain. By 1756 she could not pass the Queen's suite of rooms without having palpitations. In a letter to the comtesse de Lutzelbourg she writes with all the idle flurry of the essentially futile woman:

'The life I lead is terrible; I hardly have a minute to myself. Rehearsals and performances, and twice a week, continual journeys, whether to the Petit-Château or La Meutte, etc. Enormous load of indispensable duties, Queen, Dauphin, Dauphiness, three daughters, two Infantas; you can judge whether it is possible to breathe. Be sorry for me and don't blame me [for not writing].' Well might she say to du Hausset that her life 'could be compared with that of a Christian, as it was a perpetual combat'. And all the time those couplets with their low invective, making it more obvious that her eyes were bulging out, that her complexion was getting sallow

## THE DIAL DARKENS

and riddled with little red veins, that her lips were colourless. O for the artifices of a *toilette* which would not require such perpetual renewal!

Unknown to her, the thick coatings of rouge and white with which she plastered her face contained in those days all kinds of dangerous metals—red lead, mercury and so on. They spoilt the teeth and eyes and they ruined the nervous system. Even the most inoffensive—carmine, which was the vegetable rouge from Portugal—was given up as it caused mysterious headaches and itchings. And what of the heady scents, the richly spiced sauces and the new liqueurs of Lorraine distilling their subtle venom and corroding woman's delicate organism; the lack of exercise in fresh air, the compression of the waist in the whalebones of the tightly laced bodices, the skin diseases caused by infrequent hair washings. . . . Is it surprising that so many women of the day complain of indigestion and 'the vapours'?<sup>1</sup>

As if it were not enough to be perpetually haunted by the fear of a rival, Pompadour soon found that she had neither the temperament nor the desire to respond to the pathological ardours of Louis. He started to nickname her 'macreuse', which is the name given to very cold-blooded Lenten game. He secretly fumed at discovering 'La Russie après la Pologne', and remembering other embraces, unconsciously revenged himself on his mistress by all kinds of mental cruelties. Pompadour was beaten in the end by disgust and continual fatigue; knowing that it was the secret disillusion caused by unappeased desire which prompted Louis' many ironies, she took aphrodisiacs—all those noxious herbs and potions of the East. She knew that her position as favourite depended largely on whether she could simulate passion with success. Failing in this respect, she must recapture, during the day, the

<sup>1</sup> Concerning hair, there is the classic example of the mouse that littered in her mistress's hair.

influence she had lost at night. She knew that with men like Louis passion was the strongest link which bound them to a woman. Madame du Hausset, the woman of her bedchamber, writes:

‘I had noticed that Madame for several days past had ordered chocolate strongly flavoured with vanilla and amber to be served at her *petit déjeuner* and that she took truffles and celery soups: finding her very over-heated, I made a few pleading remarks about her diet, to which she appeared not to listen. Then I thought I should speak of it to her friend the duchesse de Brancas. “I had noticed it,” she said to me, “and I will speak of it to her in front of you.” In effect, after her *toilette*, Madame de Brancas told her of her fears for her health. “I have just been speaking of it with her,” said the duchesse, pointing to me, “and she agrees with me.” Madame displayed a little bad temper and then burst into tears. I went at once to close the door and came back to listen. “*Ma chère amie*,” said Madame to Madame de Brancas, “I am troubled with the fear of losing the King’s heart by ceasing to be agreeable to him. As you may know, men put a great price on certain things, and I have the misfortune to be of a very cold temperament. I conceived the plan of taking to a more over-heating diet to repair this fault, and for two days this elixir”, she said, “has done me quite a lot of good, or anyhow I thought I had noticed an improvement.” The duchesse de Brancas took the drug which was on the dressing table, and after having sniffed it—“Fie!” she said, “Fie!” and she threw it into the fire. Madame scolded her and said, “I do not like to be treated like a child.” She cried again and said, “You don’t know what happened to me eight days ago. The King, under the pretext that it was warm, lay down on my sofa and spent half the night there. He will tire of me and take another.” The duchesse replied: “You will not avoid it by following your diet, and it will kill you; make your society

## THE DIAL DARKENS

more and more precious to the King by your gentleness; do not repel him at other times, and leave the rest to time; the hazards of custom will attach him to you for ever." These ladies kissed one another, Madame enjoined secrecy on Madame de Brancas and the diet was given up.

'A short time after, she said to me, "The master is more pleased with me, and it is since I spoke to Quesnay, without telling him everything. He told me that in order to get what I desire, one must be careful to keep fit, try to digest one's food properly, and to attain this one must take exercise. I think that the doctor is right and I feel quite a different being. I adore that man there [the King], I would like to be agreeable to him, but alas! sometimes he thinks I am a *macreuse*. I would sacrifice my life to please him." '

<sup>1</sup>'One by one, they vanish, the lovely years, the brief years of love; they pass amid intrigues and pleasures, and the marquise feels already the little chill wind of waning love. At night, after the theatre, after the King's supper, she who was Galatea or Colette, goes up by the little dark staircase to her pretty room in the *appartement* of the high north attic. She expects the master. She must take off the wide heavy gown, the bodice with its trimmings of ribbons, the flowers, the jewels, the feathers; she must begin her night *toilette* with the care of a courtesan. To be beautiful by day, by night, at all hours, in all costumes, spite of secret sorrows and woman's ailments—what a task, what an effort! The gown has fallen, her hair unrolls in a fragrant cloud, the scented water warms the silver of the bowl, and the fluttering women create around the marquise, with her clothes slipping off, the charming disorder of a little wanton engraving. This maid covers the fire under a grey veil of light cinders, another draws back the

<sup>1</sup> This passage I have translated from the charming book of Marcelle Tinayre, *La Vie amoureuse de la marquise de Pompadour*, as it is too good not to be known.



### LA BELLE JARDINIÈRE

From an engraving in the British Museum by J. L. Anselin  
after the portrait of Madame de Pompadour by C. Van Loo  
which used to hang in the château of Bellevue

## THE BEDCHAMBER

great sumptuous curtains of the alcove, another moves a warming pan up and down in the deep bed with its froth of laces, another snuffs the candles in the wall-brackets reflected in the mirrors of the pier-glasses. Then the waiting-women go out. Madame is alone with her faithful du Hausset. In the oval mirror of her dressing table she gazes at her face, which is prepared for the night, the face known to love alone and which he wants to rediscover, always the same and yet infinitely varied. Alas! that beautiful carnal fruit is already bruised, marbled with light stains, lightly creased with those very fine wrinkles which are easily hidden by make-up but which will soon show in spite of it. The eyes, a little prominent, are ringed by dark circles, the lips are pale, the delicate tissues of the neck and bosom have already begun to wither; and all that beauty of thirty years reveals the ravages of ill health lurking in the very marrow of her organism, wherein lies the essential strength of woman.

'Illness, Love's scarecrow! . . . That is why, in this delicious bedchamber, the waiting-time before the hour of pleasure holds something of the sadness of Death itself.'

And then one day her resistance suddenly snapped: Quesnay insisted on a physical break.

This would have been the end for any other woman, but not so with Pompadour, whose emotions were controlled by the mind. Louis was not given time to think of casting her off in weariness: with instinctive foresight, knowing that he was a slave of habit and that he disliked radical change, she became gradually and very gracefully the companion of his daily life, the one who understood his ways and temperament, the woman in whom he could confide in the surety of a trusted friendship. Very prettily, she christened a bower at Bellevue by the name of 'Friendship's Grove', knowing that friendship does not fade with illness. Did Louis guess the prudence and

## THE DIAL DARKENS

self-interest which played their part in this charming make-believe?

Louis found that this woman had imperceptibly become necessary to him, not only because she could allay his ennui, but because he could speak to her of all his private affairs and she knew all about the men and women who surrounded him. Her judgment was sound. He took her advice on all things, although he asked it as if he were trifling. Had it suited her needs at the moment, there is evidence to prove that she was even prepared to become devout with him! De Croÿ says: 'Her system, which I had glimpsed for the last few years, was to get a hold over the King's mind, and, imitating Madame de Maintenon to the letter, to finish by being devout with him.'

The break took place in January 1750. Pompadour feared that when the King's daughters returned from Fontevault they would be given the big suite of rooms on the ground floor inhabited by the comtesse de Toulouse. That was the very thing she wished to avoid, as she knew that the King would be able to reach their *appartement* from his own rooms by a little hidden staircase built in the days of Madame de Montespan. She feared that he would get into the habit of going down there, of supping there, and thus gradually get outside the sphere of her influence. She determined that he should not talk about religion either with Madame Louise, his youngest daughter, who was to be a Carmelite, or with the devout Dauphin, who recited the Breviary every day as if he were a country *curé*. So she got him to give her that large suite of rooms, and she said goodbye for ever to the little Attique du Nord which had witnessed the springtime of her love affair in that memorable year of 1745.

At this point, the King might have taken the opportunity to break his fleshly chains altogether and gradually, by making a virtue of necessity, have crept back to the Sacraments. But passions too long indulged had increased beyond control, and



## LOUIS BECOMES A LIBERTINE

a craving for unripe fruit, for girls hardly out of childhood, proclaimed already the senile decrepitude of the libertine. Easter passed by, and still the King allowed the assembled crowds to know that he had not performed his Easter duties, by the mere fact of not laying his hands on the poor people afflicted with scurvy or the King's evil. Barbier in his concern was for countenancing sacrilege to keep up appearances; in his Journal, he writes: 'It is dangerous for a King to give an example like that to his people; we are on good enough terms with the Pope for the son of the Church to be given a dispensation to perform his Easter duties in whatever state he might be in, without sacrilege and with a quiet conscience.' D'Argenson writes: 'They wish to preserve an appearance of decency by a Low Mass which the Cardinal de Rohan would say in the King's closet with Reverend Father de Linières present; one would keep it very quiet that his Majesty had come neither to Confession nor to the Eucharist.' There was even talk of safeguarding externals by giving the King an unconsecrated Host to consume.

The tactics of Pompadour in this next act of the play consisted in closing her eyes to everything, and thus giving tacit consent for Louis to seduce as many girls as he wanted, provided their only hold on him was purely physical: she knew that 'ces petites-là', who 'had no education', were no real match for her. As Madame de Mirepoix had assured her with comforting if somewhat unflattering shrewdness: 'It is your staircase which the King loves, he is used to going up and down it. . . . He is not afraid of boring you.' Certainly these girls would be no match against her intelligence if they ever attempted to gain a foothold at Court. Once, a man, wretched at discovering that the King was writing to his wife, begged Madame du Hausset to ask the marquise to save her from the King. He said that his wife was 'very intelligent, a born intriguer, and that he would be in despair'. Pompadour

## THE DIAL DARKENS

showed a copy of his letter to Louis; he went very red and tore it up in a fury, but he left the woman alone: he hated scheming women and gossip. Pompadour did not pander to his lust by providing girls for him, as so many pamphlets have said. Madame du Hausset affirms that Pompadour never knew them, and we shall see later the harmless nature of the part she played in their affairs.

In the first days of the physical break between Pompadour and Louis, there was next to the *appartement* of the ambitious valet Le Bel, in the vicinity of the chapel, a lodging with two rooms guarded by a sentry where Le Bel occasionally brought for his master some of the little beauties of Paris. The place was called 'Le Trébuchet'—the snare for young birds. It was discreet and outwardly respectable. It was probably not known that, when ambitious mothers brought their young daughters to the long gallery of Versailles<sup>1</sup> to show them off, the *lieutenant de police* would entice them through a door—which would not open on them again—accuse the girl of indecent soliciting and only let her off imprisonment by selling her virtue to the King. Everybody concerned, of course, made money out of it. The King had a preference for pure girls.

It might be well to insert at this point, without comment, St. Teresa of Avila's description of her vision of Hell:

' . . . I cannot describe that inward fire or that despair, surpassing all tortures and all pain. I did not see who it was who tormented me. . . . Left in that pestilential place, and utterly without the power to hope for comfort, I could neither sit nor lie down: there was no room. I was placed as it were in a hole in the wall, and those walls, terrible to look on of themselves, hemmed me in on every side. I could not breathe. There was no light but all was thick darkness. I do not understand how

<sup>1</sup> The populace was allowed admittance into the palace.

## SNARE FOR YOUNG BIRDS

it is, though there was no light, yet everything that can give pain by being seen was visible.'

Some of the girls snared at the 'Trébuchet' who happened to please were kept for some time at a house at Versailles in what is known as the Parc aux Cerfs. When Louis XIII had come to Versailles in the early seventeenth century he had taken care to preserve the animals most frequently hunted, especially deer, by enclosing the whole of the land which now lies between the rue de Satory, rue des Rossignols and rue St. Médéric. When Louis XIV came to the throne, he sacrificed this old deer park because Versailles was becoming overcrowded, and distributed the land to a number of people, most of whom were attached to the royal household. They built houses there. In 1755 Louis XV got some confidential agents to search in that district for a quiet house in a most secluded quarter and they found 4 rue St. Médéric, a small one-storeyed house in a garden surrounded by a high wall, at the end of a blind alley with no other buildings in the immediate vicinity. Louis owned the place—through an intermediary—from 1755 to 1771. Madame du Hausset says: 'A commissioner in the Navy named Mercier, who had some share in the education of the abbé de Bourbon (son of Louis XV by Mademoiselle de Romans), was better acquainted with this establishment than anyone else, and this is what he told one of his friends: "The house was very unpretentious in appearance; there was as a rule only one young lady there. The wife of a clerk in the War Office acted as companion and played cards or did tapestry work with her. This woman used to say that the girl was her niece, and when the King was away from Versailles she would remove with her into the country."'

Du Hausset herself says that there were hardly ever more than two girls there, and very often only one. Sometimes the Parc aux Cerfs was empty for five or six months at a time.

## THE DIAL DARKENS

The whole place, with its four rooms and several closets, would only have been large enough for two or three women at the very most. This contradicts Angerville's ludicrous assertion in the *Vie privée de Louis XV* that it was a harem on which £40,000,000 were spent, and in which were enacted terrible orgies, worthy of the most decadent Roman emperors, when *hundreds* of innocent girls were defiled! The Parc aux Cerfs, though terrible, was not outside the social habits of the times, except that Louis, who rarely examined bills before signing them, was at the mercy of all the thieving *procurateurs* and agents concerned and spent much more than any wealthy financier on his *folie*. It suited the pamphleteers of the Revolution to arouse hatred against the Monarchy by magnifying the legend of this little house into which Louis slipped furtively at night by the narrow garden door.

Somewhere in *Vieux Papiers*, *Vieilles Maisons*, Monsieur Lenotre, the historian, has described this place, which still exists, though it is somewhat altered. I went to hunt it up late one dark April night. I walked down the main street along which are the original rickety seventeenth-century houses with sloping roofs and tiny attics, until I reached the deserted square around the church. Then I turned into the rue St. Médéric without meeting a soul, not even a cat. The grass grew between the cobbles and every window seemed dark and tightly shuttered. At length I spied an old man shaking out a salad basket from a small window in number five. I called out 'Hé, Monsieur, pourriez-vous me donner des renseignements sur le numéro quatre à coté?' . . . A long pause, then . . . 'Sais pas' he replied and went on shaking his salad. The place seemed strangely uncommunicative, as if it were sulking. I felt sure it was haunted.

The first inhabitant of any importance was Demoiselle Murphy, said to be of Irish origin, and called 'la petite Morfil'

## MORPHISE GALATEA

or 'Morphise'. She was at one time a model of Boucher's: we can see her in his famous picture—a roguish type of Rubens girl with dimples nestling all over the plump body. She was said to be the daughter of some old clothes woman and a cobbler who started several houses of shady repute, but of course Louis tried to make the Court believe that she was the daughter of some colonel of the Irish gentry. Pander Le Bel found her in Paris, where she was working by the day with a dressmaker called Fleuret. She was fourteen and a half years old and *fort gentille*. A thousand écus were given to the mother, 100 louis to the dressmaker (who had probably grossly underpaid her little assistant in the usual manner of the times), and the child was brought to Versailles. The King found her charming, lodged her in the little house and gave her a duenna, a lady's maid, a cook and two lackeys.

Durini, the Papal Nuncio, mentions her in a letter of May 1753. He says that the King has grown cold to the marquise, and Morfil is being taught dancing and other accomplishments, so that she can be brought to Court. On October 22nd he writes: 'At Crécy . . . there have been such scenes that everyone thought the favourite would have taken the part of retiring of her own accord, without waiting to be thrown out, but the ambitious one, persuaded that she could dispel this cloud, followed the King to Fontainebleau, although she had been made to understand that after this journey she would live at Paris rather than at Versailles. The new Irish star was to go to Fontainebleau, where an *appartement* had been prepared for her. She had received diamonds and magnificent dresses. Her emergence into full daylight was awaited, but she has not yet come because of symptoms of pregnancy. A man has been sent from Versailles to make provision of carpet in order to fill her *appartements* and prevent any danger in case of a fall.'

At length, the girl bore a daughter, who was later placed in a convent with an annuity of 8,000 livres and Morphise herself

## THE DIAL DARKENS

was dismissed and married off to a gentleman in the provinces. The unfortunate mothers were always told at first that their babies were dead so that they would not pine when they were taken away from them.

Then followed a succession of little girls, none of whom were as dangerous to the marquise—Demoiselles Trusson, Robert, Fouquet and so on; they all thought they were kept by a rich Polish lord whose real name they did not know, but whom they believed to be a relative of the Queen, with a lodging in the château itself. When they became pregnant, they were confined in a house of the avenue de St. Cloud; like Morphise they too were told at first that the baby was dead, 10,000 or 12,000 livres was settled on the child, and the mother was then presented with a dowry of 10,000 francs to get married in the provinces and disappear altogether.

These little girls, precociously brought up in the amorality and enervating sensuous atmosphere of the times, had matured very early; one must not imagine that they were innocent doves raped by a terrible eagle. However, it is sad to think of how they must have suffered if they really fell in love with Louis. Once he made one of the girls suspicious by forgetting to take off his *cordón bleu* as he hastily changed his coat in an antechamber. During the attempt on his life by Damiens, this young girl was in great despair. The duenna cajoled her into confiding in her and discovered that she had at last found out the King's identity by prying into his pockets. She warned Louis and he ruthlessly decided to visit her no more. But he continued to see another girl in the house. The forsaken one, in an agony of grief, hearing the rumble of coach wheels on the cobbles and his familiar footfall on the stair, rushed into the room where he was making love to the other inmate, threw herself on her knees and cried:

‘Yes, you are the lord of the whole kingdom, but that would be nothing to me if you were not the king of my heart.

## CLANDESTINE CONFINEMENTS

Do not leave me, dearest Sire, I thought I would go mad when they nearly killed you!

'And you are still mad,' shouted the infuriated duenna, rushing in and making as if to clutch her. Louis kissed the little girl and she became calmer. Shortly after, she was taken to a women's lunatic asylum and for several days was treated as insane.

One day, Madame du Hausset was called into the presence of the marquise: the King was there too. The Pompadour said to her: 'You must go and spend several days in the avenue de St. Cloud in a house to which I will have you taken; you will find there a young person whose confinement is very near. . . . You will be the head of the household and preside at the confinement like the goddess of the fable. You are needed so that you can see that everything goes off secretly and according to the King's orders. You will assist at the baptism and give the names of the father and mother.'

The King, who had been silent up till then, started laughing and said: 'The father is a very honest man.'

'Beloved by everybody and adored by those who know him,' said Madame de Pompadour, going towards a small cupboard and taking from it a diamond aigrette: 'I did not want it to be more beautiful, and for a very good reason,' she said, presenting it to the King.

'Even so, it is too beautiful,' said the King, embracing Madame de Pompadour; he added: 'How kind you are!'

Madame de Pompadour placed her hand on the King's heart and sighed: 'It is *that* that I begrudge.'

After having arranged a subterfuge for procuring godparents and the distribution of the christening sweetmeats, Louis XV drew 50 louis from his purse and presented them to Madame du Hausset 'with the grace he knew how to show in giving'. He added: 'You will look after the *accouchée*, won't you? She is a very good child, not remarkable in any way, and

## THE DIAL DARKENS

I trust you to be discreet; my chancellor will tell you the rest.'

When he had gone, du Hausset probably turned over in her mind what she would do with the 50 louis rattling securely in her pocket: indeed the King was generous and always gave her such beautiful china on New Year's Day. . . . Madame asked her in some confusion: 'What do you think of my role?' Du Hausset—probably remembering the money—replied: 'It is the role of a superior woman and excellent friend.'

There came, however, a day when a woman far more beautiful and charming than all the rest appeared on the scene to give Pompadour cause for serious anxiety. Sophie Arnould tells us that this celebrated Mademoiselle de Romans was so tall that Louis, himself above middle height, 'looked like a schoolboy beside her'. After baskets full of silky kittens, his fancy was taken by this tall, dignified goddess, perfectly formed, who moved with queenly grace. Her black hair was so long that when she unrolled it she was completely hidden. They say that the secret of her seduction lay in the beautiful languor of her bearing. She was better born than the others: she was the daughter of a Grenoble lawyer and her sister had brought her to the King in the gardens of Marly. She was too good to be relegated in the routine manner to the house in the rue St. Médéric—perhaps she refused to sink to that level. She was given a bigger house of her own in the village of Passy, and Barbier says the King used to visit her quite openly in a carriage drawn by six horses. There exist some interesting letters from Louis about the birth of her son, addressed 'to Mademoiselle de Romans, Grand Rue de Passy, à Passy'. There is one dated 'Versailles, January 13th, 1762', which begins 'my giantess'. She took out her baby boy herself in a Moses basket dressed in foaming laces and she showed him everywhere. At the Tuileries, when the crowds gathered



## LOUIS' INDIFFERENCE TO HIS BASTARDS

around to watch her suckling him, she would cry: 'Ah, ladies and gentlemen, do not press so, allow the King's child to breathe!'

One day while she was nursing him in the Bois de Boulogne, her lovely hair held up by a diamond comb, she saw two women coming towards her, one of them concealed by her head-dress and holding a handkerchief up to her face. The other woman greeted her and said:

'What a fine child!'

She replied: 'Yes, I must agree with you, although I am his mother.' And being asked by the other woman whether the father was handsome, she replied:

'Very good-looking. If I named him, you would agree with me.'

The other woman said: 'I have then the honour of knowing him, Madame?'

'That is very likely,' replied Mademoiselle de Romans, whose suspicions had been aroused by the way the woman was hiding the lower part of her face.

The two women went away: Madame de Pompadour, taking her handkerchief away from her face, said with a sigh to du Hausset: 'One must confess that the mother and the child are beautiful creatures.' And she returned to Versailles with despair in her heart.

But here again her sensible little friend the *maréchale* de Mirepoix reassured her. She said: '... the friendship of the King for you is the same as his liking for your *appartement* and your surroundings; you are used to his ways. ...' And then about the child: 'Be sure that the King does not care much about children. He has had enough and does not want to be bothered any more with the mother and her son. See what little attention he pays to the comte de Luc,<sup>1</sup> who resembles him in a striking manner; he never speaks of him, and I am

<sup>1</sup> His son by Madame de Vintimille.

## THE DIAL DARKENS

sure will never do anything for him. Again let me tell you, we are not living under Louis Quatorze.'

This advice gave Pompadour the presence of mind to profit by the indiscretions of Mademoiselle de Romans, who was wearying Louis by exorbitant demands for herself and her boy. Little did the 'goddess' know that by wanting to give the child the Bourbon surname she was digging her own grave. She had handed all the King's letters into the safe keeping of the abbé de Lustrac, who was educating the little Louis de Bourbon. One day the police made a forcible entry into his house and seized all his private papers, but without finding the telltale baptismal certificate. The unfortunate Mademoiselle de Romans was sent away to the provinces and married off to a man who made her very unhappy. Her child was confided by Sartine, lieutenant of police, to the care of one of his clerks, who was given an income of 5,000 livres a year to look after him. Alas, the clerk stole the money and abandoned the child. For years he could not be traced anywhere. When Louis XVI came to the throne, the unhappy mother brought him the baptismal certificate which she had secreted all those years and begged the kind-hearted monarch to find him. (Monsieur Lenotre tells us the whole story.) This boy of royal lineage was at length discovered at Lonjumeau, where he was employed as stable help. He was taken away, educated, and he eventually became a very good priest. He was the curé of St.-Philippe du Roule in Paris, and Louis XVI's aunts (Louis XV's daughters, then devout crotchety old maids) were always very kind to him. One wonders whether this tired priest walking along the rue St. Honoré realized that many years ago as a baby he had been the centre of admiring Parisian crowds as he slept in his lacy basket? It would make strange history to trace the fate of all Louis' unfortunate bastards, if only records had been kept; there must be many descendants of these children up to this very day.

## POMPADOUR BECOMES A DUCHESS

When Pompadour retired, so to speak, she had been rewarded for her amiable blindness to the King's first infidelities by a title which satisfied the most deep-rooted covetings of her pride. The comte de St. Florentin brought her a warrant couched in the following terms:

'To-day, October 12th, 1752, the King being at Fontainebleau, wishing to give marks of the particular consideration and esteem which he has for the person of Madame la marquise de Pompadour by according her a rank which distinguishes her from other ladies of the Court, His Majesty desires that she participate during her lifetime of the fame, honours, ranks and precedence, and other advantages enjoyed by *duchesses*. . . .' On Tuesday, the 17th, the rumour spread that the new duchesse would take up her *tabouret* or footstool at six o'clock. It seems that the Dauphin pulled a face at her again as she curtsied to him.

From now on, she was entitled to sit at the *grand couvert* or official dinner with the King, the Queen, the Dauphin and the King's daughters; she was present at public *toilettes*, audiences, receptions. The privileged *tabouret* was carried by a page wherever she went. She was given an armchair with the princesses of the blood royal and, furthermore, *they* were obliged to show her out of a room. Her coaches, which she had upholstered in scarlet, were allowed to go right into the inner courtyard of the Louvre and other royal houses. All these apparently trivial distinctions were matters of life and death to the idle aristocracy of the day, any member of which was prepared to risk perpetual exile and worse, rather than allow another to usurp his special privileges.

Can the satisfaction of woman's most tenacious vanities ever console her for not being adored as of old?

## CHAPTER XIX

### TEMPORAL PUNISHMENT AND FAMILY CONSOLATIONS

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*Alexandrine at Versailles. Acts in plays. Pompadour's match-making rebuffed. 'Grand-père's' visits to the convent. Alexandrine dies suddenly. Pompadour's grief. Monsieur Poisson dies. Letter-writing of the day. Monsieur Poisson in later life. Pompadour consoled by friendship with brother. Her letters to Abel. Her maternal advice and philosophical reflections. Pompadour's brother journeys to Italy. Visits the Pope. Blood-riots in Paris. Abel sensitive about his birth. His unhappy marriage.*

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*'I sought no more that after which I strayed  
In face of man or maid;  
But still within the little children's eyes  
Seems something, something that replies;  
They at least are for me, surely for me!  
I turned me to them very wistfully;  
But, just as their young eyes grew sudden fair  
With dawning answers there,  
Their angel plucked them from me by the hair.'*  
(*The Hound of Heaven.* FRANCIS THOMPSON.)

Alexandrine had been six months old in February 1745 when Pompadour had first spoken to Louis at the masked ball at Versailles. One hears nothing of this forlorn child until the early spring of 1750, when at the age of five and a half years she was brought to Versailles. Very probably the way her father sought consolation with actresses like Mademoiselle Rem did not create a proper atmosphere for her upbringing: her mother thought Versailles was more

## POMPADOUR'S AMBITIONS FOR HER DAUGHTER

suitable. There is a picture of Alexandrine, very plump and not too pretty, at the Victoria and Albert Museum, and there is also a large picture of her by F. Guérin in the collection of Baron Eugène de Rothschild. Pompadour is sitting in her magnificent new drawing-room, which glows richly with brocades and mirrors; she is looking on in matronly fashion at a red-cheeked little girl playing with a canary near a wooden cage.

Du Hausset looked after Alexandrine, and Crébillon was deputed to give her lessons with special instructions not to turn her into a blue-stocking. Pompadour suddenly discovered that she adored the child and she displayed her with great pride to the King and her friends. To show her off to the best advantage, she gave her small parts in her plays; and she writes to Monsieur Poisson, the doting grandfather: 'The little Alexandrine dressed as a Grey Sister has taken a part in the *théâtre des Petits Appartements*.' She took her on all her journeys and, when she could not devote enough time to her, sent her to 'Grand-père'.

She planned a glorious future for her; never would she have to fight for social recognition in the way her mother had done. One day she pointed out to Louis how prettily Alexandrine was playing in the fig garden with the little comte de Luc—who was a smaller edition of his father and not much older than Alexandrine. They were eating figs and *brioques* brought by a house-porter. Pompadour said timidly to Louis: 'They would make a beautiful couple.' But Louis seemed absorbed by the little girl. Pompadour tried again. Noticing attitudes in the boy exactly like his father's, she cried: 'Ah, look! Sire, one can almost see his father.' Louis replied rather sardonically:

'I had no idea you knew the comte de Luc so intimately.'

She said: 'You ought to kiss him, for he is very pretty.'

He replied: 'Then I will begin with the young lady.' And

## TEMPORAL PUNISHMENT

he kissed both of them very coldly and with an air of constraint.

When she was preparing for bed that night, she said to du Hausset with tears in her eyes that because the boy was the King's son 'I prefer him, my good dame, to all the petty dukes of the Court. My grandchildren would participate in their likeness to the grandfather and grandmother, and that union, which I hope to see, will be my happiness one day.' This is not, as Sainte-Beuve says, the matrimonial planning of the 'bourgeoise perversie', the 'Greuze-Pompadour', but the ambitions of thwarted maternal love. Already her offers of Alexandrine's hand to other nobles had been politely but firmly declined. It was all very well to pay one's court to the King's concubine when its performance might bring in a few advantages, but to blot one's scutcheon for ever by the bar sinister of a fish-bone was more than could be expected of courtesy.

When Alexandrine was six years old, Pompadour put her to school in the Assumption, the best convent in Paris for rich heiresses and daughters of the nobility. The faithful du Hausset had prepared the child by telling her how much she would enjoy being with other young ladies of her age and especially the little princesse de Soubise—whose father was a devoted friend of Pompadour's. After that 'she only lived for the moment of going there, so true is it that one can persuade children to believe everything when one goes about it the right way.'

Old Fishy's letters are full of his two Alexandrines. All the love he had desired to lavish on his own child Toinette he now poured forth on his grandchild. One wonders if Alexandrine had mixed feelings when she was called to the parlour on feast days to go out with this vulgar red-nosed old man who smelt of the bottle. Perhaps she was sensitive to the whisperings of her snobbish little friends. In his letters he

## CONVENT INTRIGUES AROUND ALEXANDRINE

teased Pompadour delicately and pretended to prefer the little 'fan fan' to the big one, and Pompadour made a pretty show of tender jealousy. She also scolded him for giving the child fits of indigestion. He wrote to Uncle Abel that he was going to visit Alexandrine, who had been at the Assumption for ten days: 'You can picture how this morning I went to take my *déjeuner* with her.' It seems the child said she was even happier at the convent than with her *belle Maman*, 'because of her desire to learn in order to make herself worthy of the kindnesses of *belle Maman*.' One wonders what a world of meaning lies hidden in those unnaturally prim words. 'Grand-père' naïvely tells Abel that he has gone to the Assumption 'to visit my little jewel. She is an incomprehensible child: she reads and writes better than I do; her mother was very astonished to see her read your hunting letter two days ago at La Meutte.' Pompadour's luxurious coach often went to fetch her, one day to Choisy, another day to a box at the Opéra. One can imagine the adulations which surrounded the child at the convent, the jealousies stifled by budding ambitions, the intrigues springing up around her among those little girls who were so old for their age and who had been coached by their parents on how to treat this important little commoner. She was called by her baptismal name, as was customary solely with *princesses*.

Only with her papa and brother could Pompadour unburden herself of all those little maternal anxieties which seem so important to the mother and so trivial to outsiders; she knew that *they* would sympathize when Alexandrine got very thin, when she was ill with the cutting of two eye teeth, and above all when that ugliness, probably inherited from the excellent Monsieur d'Étioles, became obvious. How revealing are the lines which she writes on this subject:

'I think she is becoming very ugly; as long as she does not become extremely shocking I shall be satisfied, for I am very

## TEMPORAL PUNISHMENT

far from wishing her to have a superlatively lovely face; it only seems to make enemies of the whole female sex for you, which, with the friends of these women, makes up two-thirds of the whole world.'

On June 15th, 1754, before Alexandrine had reached the age of ten, Pompadour was in the midst of some charming festivities at Bellevue in connection with three marriages she had arranged, when a messenger came to tell her that Alexandrine was dead. The cause of her death was unknown at the time. She had fallen ill on the day after the routine 'purgation'. When the doctors came next day, before her mother could reach her, she was dead. Foolish rumours were afloat that she had been poisoned by the Jesuits, but these were quickly disproved.

Pompadour put off the wedding festivities for ten days. When they took place, she had to conceal her grief, preside at the dinner and kiss the little convent brides. What sadness must have weighed on her heart as she put away for ever her dream of twining a wreath of orange blossom for her own little 'fan fan'. The thought of Monsieur d'Étioles came back to her mind: through her own fault they could no longer console each other in this, their common grief.

She had received the news at a critical moment and she fell ill. The King paid many visits to his 'amie inconsolable'. But here again she displayed surprising self-mastery. De Croÿ, describing her six weeks later at Compiègne, said he knew that she was crushed but she did not allow it to show because of the harm it might do to her face and her position. She spoke much and vivaciously and appeared as gay on the surface as she was unhappy within.

Indeed she had much grief that summer. Ten days after Alexandrine's death, Monsieur Poisson died of dropsy. He had not been able to survive the blow of his grandchild's



## POMPADOUR AS LETTER-WRITER

death. All the people who had been linked to her girlhood were dying off. Soon she would have no one with whom to talk about old times and in whose company she could really be herself.

Reading a contemporary correspondence is one of the best ways of getting into the life and heart of a century, particularly if one can get hold of the original letters, and provided that these are not illegible like Napoleon's. The sparkling gossip of the times can be recaptured in so many notes written in *style à la diable* by a multitude of women. From them one can glean the surprising seriousness, the philosophical reflections on happiness and the political theories which abound more and more as the century progresses.

From the correspondence of Pompadour and her father it is possible to reconstruct his later life and see her own filial tenderness. From the very beginning of her early married life he was charmed by the distinguished little Toinette; he could never cease being surprised that he was her father. The correspondence begins on September 3rd, 1741, and very characteristically:

'MY VERY DEAR PAPA,

'Don't be anxious about my health any more, I beg you, it is splendid at present. I have had two fits of quartan ague. . . . Good-bye my dear Papa, look after yourself and take care of a life to which is attached your daughter,

'P. D'ÉTIOLLES.'

He reveals himself as a typical bourgeois, it oozes out in all his paternal effusions; he is always thinking in terms of money. But he had so much good nature and so little haughtiness that Pompadour felt tenderly indulgent and amused. It is diverting to watch this son of a Burgundy weaver assume with apprehension his role of feudal lord and proprietor;

## TEMPORAL PUNISHMENT

he was received in triumph at his new estate of Marigny, complimented by Monsieur le curé and his parishioners, led to his bench in church to the sound of *Te Deum*! The village girls and boys, dressed as shepherds and shepherdesses, preceded by the mounted police, accompanied him with songs; when they reached the château they presented their new lord with the local wine ornamented with flowers and garnished with marchpane (a gift much appreciated by old Fishy, who was fond of the bottle and of whom his daughter says with necessary reticence on the occasion of an illness: 'He treats himself in his own fashion. . .'). After dark there were fireworks in the park and the inhabitants illuminated their windows. The night was spent in dancing. He wrote to his children:

'Thank God, my arrival, which I dreaded so much, has been made; I should have been cross now if it had not taken place.'

Pompadour was very anxious that the château should be properly furnished. On this subject Poisson writes to Abel:

'Your sister wishes to send me, on the back of a porter, the prettiest writing table in the world. Also, in spite of all I can say she wants to lend me her upholsterer. . . .'

And again: 'Monsieur de la Reynière has just sent me by his messenger a case in which I found a complete green suit, embroidered, and with gold buttonholes, the most beautiful thing in the world, which your sister has given me. That dear sister knows only how to give and please everybody.'

And again: 'Your dear sister is adorable, one only has to wait for her heart to speak.'

Monsieur Poisson built at Marigny a chapel with a dome and placed in it the rosary which the Pope had given to Abel during his visit to Rome. This charmed the local curé, who must have been a very guileless soul; for Fishy assures us that the curé is 'quite crazy about him'! Monsieur de Nolhac (who understood him much better than the fastidious de Goncourts)

## FISHY BECOMES A GENTLEMAN

makes a perfect little picture of him at Marigny. 'He has tables full of friends who, like himself, adore ratafia with the excellent burgundy from his cellars. There are the neighbouring squires from the countryside together with their spouses, flocks of cousins and Monsieur de Tournhem and the financiers Paris-Duverney. They knew they pleased Pompadour by going to see the old man. One can easily picture those good-looking old men in their carefully tended wigs and flower-embroidered waistcoats, sitting at Marigny in a grove *à la française*, drinking coffee in delicate cups from Vincennes as they talk of the adorable young woman who unites them in friendship and inspires them all with the same devotion. They pleased Monsieur Poisson by giving him news of her and of her health. . . . He was no more moral than those around him and he had no breeding, but he was no hypocrite and he did not lack finesse and good humour. . . . He was more braggart than coarse rustic, and he was dazzled by the honours which rained down on his daughter. . . . When he went to see her perform at those select theatricals, he did not care a fig that the aristocrats showed disgust at his approach, but he went on enjoying his happy fate with incomparable serenity.'

But now, of her own family, there was only her brother left; and she wrote him some of her best letters. Her whole correspondence is enormous—one wonders how she found time for it. Her notepaper is of small size with gilt edges, some sheets having blue and carmine flowers on the edge, some being framed with violet flowers rather like Maltese crosses and others surrounded with alternate green and violet stars. She never begins with the usual formula of politeness; she puts the date of the day and the month without the year; she never signs an intimate letter bearing her own seal of three towers. She has nicknames for her friends—Madame de Lutzelbourg is 'la Grand'Femme', Bernis is 'son pigeon pattu', the duc de Chaulnes 'son cochon', Monsieur de St.

## TEMPORAL PUNISHMENT

Florentin 'le petit saint', Paris-Duverney 'son nigaud', Monsieur de Paulmy 'sa petite horreur', the duc de Nivernais 'son petit époux', and so on. Her style is *sans gêne*, her cordiality is brusque, almost masculine. Her notes to Madame de Lutzelbourg have all the freedom of a chat. She speaks of a multitude of things in the same breath—of her grief at the death of the 'Petite Madame' when the duc de Bourgogne was born, of her diet of asses' milk, of selling a knot of diamonds to pay her debts, of commissioning her friend to find her a silk fabric called *gourgouran* which wears better than taffeta, of the death of Madame de Mailly, of her grief at the death of the maréchal de Saxe, of marrying off the girls in her villages, of her anger at rumours which the Parisians are spreading about her extravagance; and in a special letter (1750) she describes the King's daughters with great sympathy. One gets the impression that she is very interested in all Court affairs, that she is continually running a temperature and that, being so busy, she tries to make up for only writing a few lines by protestations of affection. There is one fascinating letter about Stanislas' midget, who danced beautifully, hopping and skipping on a dinner table without upsetting anything.<sup>1</sup>

Pompadour's letters to her brother or 'frérot', as she called him, are the most interesting of the lot. One can see him in the portrait by Tocqué with that smiling and almost princely beauty which was his before he got too plump. He was so elegant and pleasant that the King loved him, invited him to his supper parties and called him 'petit frère'. Though she never had to blush for his manners, still the Court found something to criticize in his modesty, in that timidity which

<sup>1</sup> See Dutens, *Mémoires d'un voyageur qui se repose*, Paris, 1806. This little creature had his cradle in a wooden shoe. He was a very agreeable, very beautiful human miniature and was once served under the crust of a pie to amuse the guests. One day he nearly got lost in the high grass. It was useless to try to teach him reading or writing or the catechism; he could only hold one idea in his head at a time.

## POMPADOUR'S KINDNESS TO HER BROTHER

probably concealed sensitive pride, for they said that his lack of ambition was like the fumbling of a nonentity. They started singing songs about him which irritated Pompadour. They called him Monsieur d'Avant Hier instead of Monsieur de Vandières. She urged him to be more self-assured, more at his ease, but he still showed embarrassment when he dropped his handkerchief in the Galerie of Versailles and a whole crowd of *cordons bleus* fell on it and started disputing the honour of picking it up.

Although Pompadour was very generous, she never squandered gifts on people who did not deserve them. When Abel was appointed *Directeur-général des Bâtiments du Roi*, which involved the supervision of the academies and art collections in France, she determined that the post should not be a sinecure and sent him to Italy to complete his artistic education. This journey, made at leisure, in the company of artists who observed with reflection and taste, was to serve for a great transformation of French art in that century.

Her first letter, which Abel received at Lyons on December 28th, 1749, contains certain important instructions. She recommends him the greatest politeness and discretion to everybody, not only to a chosen few.

'Do not think that because I am young I cannot give good advice; I have seen so much during the four and a half years I have been here, that I know more than a woman of forty.'

He travelled like a *grand seigneur* at the King's expense, he was ordered to keep open table everywhere; he was welcomed by the King's ministers at the Italian Courts. In each town he had introductions to distinguished and scholarly men. Pompadour urged him to profit by their talk: 'A conversation with a learned man is often worth more than seeing things for oneself.' On April 12th, 1750, she ordered three summer suits of clothes to be sent to him, 'which are very becoming, that is to

## TEMPORAL PUNISHMENT

say handsome, without being too magnificent'. As his letters ran the risk of being opened, she insisted on caution.

He sent her very interesting observations and little drawings of the curious things he saw, and sometimes bought her presents. She writes to thank him for a piece of crystal with a beautiful fiery gleam, and says she has had it mounted on a sweet box. She sympathizes with him over catching an erysipelas at Castel-Gandolfo and she teases him about his flirtation with a Madame Victorina of Genoa.

Among his many introductions there was one to the Pope, who gave him an excellent welcome. Pompadour wrote him an extraordinary letter when she heard of this, and one must conclude that the tone of it is dictated by her knowledge that her letters might be opened:

'I am very pleased with the reception which the Holy Father has given you. The consideration which I am shown does not astonish me in this part of the world where everybody has, or may have need of my services; but I was surprised that this consideration had reached as far as Rome. In spite of this agreeable news, which one must enjoy, as it exists, my head is not turned, and except for the happiness of being loved by those one loves, which belongs to all states of life, a solitary and not too brilliant existence is much to be preferred.'

She also teased him about this visit. 'I do not doubt that you derived great satisfaction from kissing the slipper of the Holy Father and have been granted any number of indulgences,' she says in the superior tone of an enlightened disciple of Voltaire. To none other of her correspondents so much as to Abel does she reveal her disillusion with the human race. On May 28th, 1750, she writes:

'As I grow older, my dear brother, my reflections become more philosophical. I am well persuaded that in time you will think as I do. Setting aside the happiness of being with the

## POMPADOUR ESCAPES THE MOB

King, which assuredly consoles me for everything, the rest is all a tissue of wickedness, meanness, in short, of all the contemptible acts of which poor human beings are capable. Matter enough for reflection, especially for one, like myself, of a naturally reflective turn of mind.'

This was written at a time when the police of Paris had been collecting all the vagrant children in the streets with a view to sending them out to colonize the Mississippi. Some of the police kidnapped the children of respectable *bourgeois* families and held them up for a ransom. The rumour went round that the King was leprous through debauchery and needed the blood of live children to bathe in. Terrible things were said about Pompadour, 'the King's bitch', and on May 16th the whole of the St.-Antoine quarter rioted and attacked the police. On the 23rd the mangled body of a police spy was laid at the doorstep of Berryer, the head of police. One day Pompadour had the imprudence to come to Paris in her coach, and barely escaped being torn to pieces by the raving mob.

What ennui we find in her letters, what fundamental disenchantment! She says: 'I have seen and thought much since I have been here, and have at least gained more knowledge of human beings; and I assure you that they are the same in Paris or in a provincial town as they are at Court.'

On his return to Versailles, Abel was the despair of his ambitious sister. He realized that any consideration he received at Court was entirely on his sister's account. He would not go a-wooing as he feared the titterings and quizzing glasses and snubbings of the noble ladies of his sister's choice. He was perfectly happy in the world of artists: class distinctions didn't count there and he felt at home. In spite of the wars at the end of the reign, the arts did not languish during the time of his directorship. He raised the price of pictures commissioned by the Crown, and sent the money in a mag-

## TEMPORAL PUNISHMENT

nificent blue morocco portfolio—a delicate attention which the artist appreciated. Quesnay declared that he was never understood. Du Hausset said that he was an extremely honourable man in whom people refused to see anything but the brother of the favourite; because he was stout, they thought him dull and stupid. He had all the proud humility of the class-conscious man, desiring to belittle himself before other people got the chance of doing so. When Marmontel congratulated him on receiving the order of the *Saint-Esprit*, he said: ‘Monsieur, the King wipes off the meanness of my birth.’ Indeed the ignominy of the gallows from which his father had escaped overshadowed his whole life. Too truthful to boast, he was taken at his own valuation. He married unhappily. He was terribly jealous of his wife’s friendship with her own sister: he probably had the sensitiveness of lonely people who want to be loved exclusively. In the end, she ran away, disguised as a page boy, to follow her lover the cardinal de Rohan.



## CHAPTER XX

### THE HOBBIES OF A ROYAL MISTRESS

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*Her many houses. Party at La Celle. House in Paris. Passion for gardens. Hermitage. Grand Trianon. Pavillon Français. Flowers. Patronage of Sèvres china manufacture and École Militaire. Organizes sale at Versailles. Laughs at St.-Cyr. Copy of her engravings at Victoria and Albert Museum. Helped by Guay. Printing of Song of Songs, etc. Plans rebuilding of Paris. Her library.*

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*'The bewitching of vanity obscureth good things, and the wandering of concupiscence overturneth the innocent mind.'* (WISDOM iv. 12.)

THE hobbies of this most cultivated of all royal mistresses would fill a book of their own. The most important was the building of houses. One must be satisfied to pass with her, swiftly as in a dream, through all the places she would visit in the short space of a week. As she says herself, she was always 'on the roads', rushing about from one of her country estates to the other, that Louis might have distraction. A mile from Versailles on the road to Marly was La Celle, which she called 'le petit château', in spite of its seventeen suites of rooms. She used it simply as a little house for intimate suppers, or for a brief rest in the country in the great heat of summer. It was situated amid terraces and woody bowers. On one side a long boat was moored on a lake surrounded by those trellises against which the *gouaches* of the eighteenth century show little colonnades of hollyhocks, their tones of rose and sulphur yellow reflected in the motionless water. In August 1748, she gave an outdoor reception there. The gondola, the lake and the arcades of the

## THE HOBBIES OF A ROYAL MISTRESS

little wood were all lit up by hanging glass lanterns. A few very special guests had received tickets on which were written these three words: 'Bon pour entrer.' The time was 10 o'clock at night. The King was finishing his dessert when Pompadour appeared in the costume of Night, singing: 'Come hither, come hither, all ye here, follow me!' and she led them into the wood where small children danced a ballet to a choir of unseen voices. Then the guests put on dominoes and masks and scattered to wander at will in the luminous night of the park.

Besides her suite in the palace of Versailles, she possessed Bellevue, La Celle, the Palais d'Evreux in Paris, Montretout, a house in the town of Versailles, a *hermitage* in the grounds of Versailles near the Grille du Dragon, another *hermitage* at Fontainebleau, houses at Champs and St.-Ouen. She even altered and decorated houses in which the King gave her hospitality, as, for example, at Choisy. M. Campardon tells us she also owned the estates of la Garancière, Deux Églises, Bret, La Roche, La Rivière in the Limousin, and the property of Pompadour. At the very end, she bought Ménars, the delightful estate on the Loire, but only stayed there once. All these places needed upkeep and decoration: she must forever be choosing new curtains, replacing furniture and so on. The Paris house which she bought from the comte d'Evreux in the rue St. Honoré is now the Élysée, where the presidents of the Republic live.

Later, when she spoke of buying up some ground in the Champs Élysées to make a kitchen garden, she was forced by public murmurings to give it up. She rebuilt all the first floor, refurnished it entirely, hung it with Gobelins tapestries woven with two L's surmounted by a royal crown, and placed at the windows curtains costing five to six hundred livres.

But what cost the nation such vast sums was the army of sculptors, painters, builders in marble, gilders, smelters,

## A GARDEN PLEASAUNCE

workers in glass, carpenters, florists, gardeners, which she trundled around to each new estate.

She shared with the King a passion for gardens. Her *hermitage* at Versailles—for which she was given over twelve acres of land in February 1749—had an exquisite rose grove enclosing a white marble Adonis in a temple of green. In Louis XVI's reign it would become the possession of her enemy Maurepas.

In the *Revue de l'histoire de Versailles* for 1901-2 there is an article on the 'Hermitage de Versailles', but I feel that the author, M. Juste Fennebresque, has confused the two places, for he really means the house which Pompadour owned at Versailles. It is now the desolate hôtel des Réservoirs, once of international repute among royalty. She possessed fifty orange-trees, lemons in cases, laurel-trees, one olive-tree, one yellow jasmine of Judea, two oleanders, one of which had double plants, and, in the botanical garden of rare specimens, one sensitive plant. She was taken there in a little carriage called *vinaigrette*—a wheeled chair with two arms, drawn by a single man—and she writes to a friend that she is alone there with the King or a few companions. The bedroom was particularly lovely, with some beautifully bound books, and paintings of pots of flowers and shepherdesses above the door.

One can still see faint vestiges of past splendour by peering through the glass door of the deserted porter's room.<sup>1</sup>

It was built in 1752 on the site of the water pump of Francine. A corridor against the wall of the reservoir formed a covered way between the château and the house.

The King stopped there on his way back from the hunt. She would surprise him by appearing in the disguise of a milk-maid, offering him warm milk.

<sup>1</sup> One must remember that two storeys were added to the house after her time. Much information may be gained from the retired proprietor, who lives near.

## THE HOBBIES OF A ROYAL MISTRESS

After Pompadour's death, this house went to Mesdames the King's daughters, who deemed all the statues, except Diana, indecent, and had them moved away. But Diana herself was replaced with a statue of the Sacred Heart by the nuns who turned the house into a convent during part of the nineteenth century. The inventory of the furniture sold during the Revolution—probably at the year-long auction of the palace furniture—included a chest of citron wood with Chinese lacquer veneers decorated with medallions of birds and butterflies, and with cameos of blue and white porcelain.

As for the Grand Trianon, Louis had given it long ago to the Queen because she liked it. But in December 1744 he must have taken it back again, for we are told that after the death of the duchesse de Châteauroux 'the King hid his grief at La Meutte until Trianon was ready for him, as it was sad and cold in winter and in need of repair'. Perhaps poor Marie had no money for its upkeep.

Pompadour acquired the Grand Trianon in 1749. She had a cowshed and dairy put there to amuse Louis, and a large menagerie of hens and some Dutch cows.

On January 14th, 1753, the duc de Luynes writes that the King spent much of his time at Trianon. (The Petit Trianon which Marie-Antoinette was to love was built by Gabriel towards the end of the reign, whereas this Grand Trianon had been built by Hardouin-Mansard under Louis XIV.) Luynes tells us that in the centre of the new kitchen garden there was a drawing-room or summer house for hot weather (built in 1751) where the King could 'dally and chatter in peace with Mme de Pompadour'. It can still be seen now, this costly one-roomed retreat with its marble floor and its ring of tiny adjoining closets for resting. An old engraving from a drawing by the chevalier de l'Espinasse shows us that the long French windows must have overlooked alleys, bordered with

## LOTUS, LILY AND VERONICA...

orange-trees and fountains, decorated with gilt statues of children. We are told by a contemporary that, after Versailles and Marly, nothing in the world could touch the gardens of Trianon for design and beauty nor equal the perfume from the violets, orange blossom and jasmine. From the official account book called *Comptes des Bâtiments* one can see lists of plants: narcissi from Constantinople, Roman hyacinths, Persian irises, scarlet lobelias (called cardinal flowers), white lotuses, and jonquils from Provence. From a note of 1693, one learns that already there were sweet-williams, Spanish carnations, pasque-flowers or Flora's bells, stocks, lilies, valerian and veronica.

Besides building, furnishing and garden-planning, which were the chief hobbies of Pompadour and her principal way of giving employment and inspiration to artists, there were two other interests which grew to fill her life and which actually did much good: the china factory at Sèvres and the École Militaire. She had always been ambitious for immortal fame, and these were two ways by which she felt she could inscribe her name for ever in the annals of French history. Until then, France had always bought porcelain from Saxony or China—in fact the nation spent four to five hundred thousand livres every year on things which, as Pompadour pointed out to the apathetic Louis, could easily have been manufactured at home. First attempts to found the factory in other places were not successful, and d'Argenson predicted ruin. At length, in 1756, she brought the factory from Vincennes into the great building of Sèvres. She urged her chemists to try all the different soils of France. Sculptors, painters of landscapes and flowers were put under Bachelier and the manufacture was declared *Royal*, like the Savonnerie and the Gobelins. Can one not picture her choosing the direction of Sèvres for an afternoon walk, flattering and encouraging the artists, christening with her name the newly discovered delicate rose col-

## THE HOBBIES OF A ROYAL MISTRESS

our (which must not be confused with *rose du Barry*). She assured the fortune of Sèvres by inaugurating a sale of china in the château of Versailles and acting herself as saleswoman. She said:

‘You are not a true citizen unless you buy as much of this china as you can afford.’<sup>1</sup> And very soon her patronage set a new fashion: it became the rage to buy these delicate cups and magnificent vases patterned with copies of all the flowers in the Versailles gardens. With a gesture of her pretty little fingers, the marquise had brought to life a whole world of enchanting vases and figures, and among them, porcelain nymphs and shepherds piping her fame more clearly than she could ever have hoped.

At first Louis was not enthusiastic about her scheme for the École Militaire, as he disapproved of enterprises whose good results would be remote. Just as Madame de Maintenon had immortalized her name by founding St.-Cyr for the daughters of poor noblemen, so Pompadour wanted to complete Louis XIV’s idea of the Invalides by founding this military school which would make the King the father of the sons of soldiers killed in the army or ruined while on his service. Her passion for this became almost an obsession, and it appeared for a moment as if her heart were inspired and uplifted with her scheme. She consulted with Paris-Duverney, ‘son cher nigaud’, about the plans and begged him to study St.-Cyr. In a letter dated September 18th, 1750, on returning from a visit to St.-Cyr, she wrote:

‘We went the day before yesterday to St.-Cyr. I cannot tell you how moved I was with this establishment, as well as with everything in it: they all came to tell me that a similar one should be founded for men: that made me want to laugh, for

<sup>1</sup> 500 men were employed at Sèvres—60 of them painters. Some earned as much as a louis a day. At the sale at Versailles, a vase was 25 livres, a plate 50 livres, a coffee cup 2 louis.

they will think, when our project is made known, that it is they who suggested it.'

The tax on cards which was levied in order to provide the money for this school (which was to be the nursery of the young Napoleon) was not sufficient, so in January 1758 there was a public lottery. There is a charming and rare little volume ornamented with 90 engravings by Gravelot: *Useful and Agreeable Almanack of the Lottery for the Royal Military School*, 1760.

Pompadour had three other hobbies which raised her from dilettante patronage into the rank of the intelligent amateur—engraving, printing and serious reading. There is a copy of her engravings at the Victoria and Albert Museum: laboured and uninspired though they are, they do credit to her patient interest in this agreeable amateur talent, this capricious little feminine pastime which engaged the attention of so many women of her day. Duchess and *bourgeoise* alike enjoyed making a collection of engraving plates, lively and artless, 'scratched, as it were, on the copper sheet with a pin taken from a ribbon'.

Pompadour invited to her rooms the engraver Guay: sometimes she took his place and spent hours bending over some engraving. But connoisseurs have criticized her because, 'instead of sketches taken from real life, intimate portraits, interiors, corners of drawing-rooms which give fleeting glimpses of the time, the indiscreet smile, and confidences, which should be the chief interest of her work, one only finds the engraved stones of Guay, allegories and trophies, the drawers of a collector of medals. . . .' This is in direct contrast with her influence on artists, for she sometimes drew away Boucher from Olympus and the world of fable, and made him draw scenes of common life, replace Alexanders and Caesars by milkmaids and *jardinières*. She thought so highly of the

## THE HOBBIES OF A ROYAL MISTRESS

little collection of engravings she had made that she left it to Louis in her will. It is significant that she was very fond of engraving emblems of Friendship.

Pompadour was also interested in printing. She watched at Versailles the setting up of the type of one of Corneille's tragedies. She had printed in her room, under her eyes, the Song of Songs and a *précis* of the book of Ecclesiastes paraphrased by Voltaire. There is a curious note by Monsieur de Marigny, her brother, about the printing of the tragedy *Rodogune*: 'As the suite of my sister was situated facing north, "au nord" was put instead of the usual mark.'

Sometimes she had conferences with architects and designers for the beautifying of Paris: she wanted to complete the Louvre and make it into a museum for France, to demolish the old houses on the bridges, clear away the quayside, rebuild the Cité, and plant gardens here, there and everywhere in that compact little capital.

One day she wasted her time writing a very bad madrigal to Louis in which she pretends to be jealous of Aurora:

*Quel voile opportun nous couvre.  
Je veux un moment  
Parcourir mon amant.*

Her taste as a book-lover is not so shocking. Her library was for use rather than for ornament—she went to it for reference and instruction on French history, etiquette and the lives of famous people. She had a vast collection of stories and songs. England is represented by Hume, Swift, Burnet, Pope and Milton. There is, at the British Museum, a valuable and rare octavo volume containing a list of prices realized by the sale of Pompadour's books: *Catalogue des livres de la bibliothèque de feu Mme. la Marquise de Pompadour, dame du Palais de la reine*, Paris, 1765. Before giving a selection from the list, one should indicate three books which are of particular inter-



POMPADOUR'S LIBRARY

est. First, an *Office of the Virgin Mary for every day of the week*, Imprimerie Royale, 1757, two volumes in blue morocco with gold clasps, with eight illustrations by Boucher; secondly a work bearing the sub-title 'La nécessité d'être inconstant', by the wife of a distinguished statesman who preferred Diderot to her husband; and thirdly, a copy of *Daphnis and Chloe* illustrated by Cochin and Eisen. Mr. Andrew Lang in his *Books and Bookmen* says that this volume changed hands towards the last part of the nineteenth century in a village in Hungary for 10 francs.

Here is a short selected list of a few of these volumes, choicely bound in red, green and citron morocco:

*Actes et décrets de la Sorbonne sur la Constitution Unigenitus.*  
Sermons of Bourdaloue and Massillon.

*Réflexions sur la miséricorde de Dieu* (par Mme. de La Vallière) *avec sa vie pénitente.* Paris, 1726. In 12 volumes.

*Prières et instructions chrétiennes pour bien commencer et bien finir la journée.*

A few books of medicine, anatomy and surgery.

Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

*The Rape of the Lock* becomes: *La Boucle de cheveux enlevée*—Poème héroï-comique de Pope, traduit en prose par l'Abbé des Fontaines. Paris, 1736.

*Lives of the Saints.* Only 3 sets (7 volumes in all).

A history of Port-Royal and the Jesuits.

A history of Mary Stuart.

Several histories of different countries: quite a lot on Poland (probably because of the Queen).

*Vie de Mme. Henriette*, par Mme. de La Fayette.

*Mémoires*, par l'abbé de Choisy.

*Manon Lescaut*, par l'abbé Prévost.

*La vie de la mère Marguerite-Marie Alacoque*, par M. Languet, Evêque de Soissons. 1729.

*Vie de M. L'Abbé de Choisy.* Lausanne (?), 1748.

## THE HOBBIES OF A ROYAL MISTRESS

*Pompe funèbre de M. de Crébillon.*

Much music—Lulli, Rameau, etc.

*Le Devin du Village*—paroles et musique de J. J. Rousseau.

1753.

*Motets et chansons.*

*Motets et sonates.*

*Noëls choisis et connus.*

Engravings.

Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

*Caractères de La Bruyère.*

Catalogue of printed books from the library of the King.

*Heures, prières et offices à l'usage et dévotion des demoiselles de Saint-Cyr.* Paris, 1714.

*L'Utilité de la souffrance*, par Louise de La Vallière.

From the Fathers—St. Augustine.

Life of Coligny.

Much about Louis XIV and the history of France.

*Mémoires de Mlle de Montpensier.*

*Lettres de Madame de Maintenon.*

Pompadour knew Spanish and Italian, and could draw inspiration from the many novels and romances of Spain and Italy to amuse the King in his hours of boredom. One is struck by the number of serious volumes which kept her conversant with affairs of state and historical precedence, books on old French law, and the histories of many countries besides France. As a friend of the philosophers, she had at hand the moralists both ancient and modern: it has been said she added 'the wisdom of paganism to the philosophy of Voltaire to strengthen her stoicism in her last hours'. She possessed a valuable collection on the theatre, and an enormous number of works to distract the imagination—perhaps these fairy-tales and novels of chivalry gave her an illusion of happiness and helped her to forget for a while the sordid disenchantment of her own *amour*. One can see the ghost of

## BOOKS A BALM IN DISILLUSION

the marquise, irritated by the intrigues which dogged the initiation of Sèvres and the École Militaire, worried by debts for the building and furnishing of her many houses, tired by the demands of her voluminous correspondence, looking round her library with a sigh of pleasure. The authors of that delightful book, *An Adventure*, should seek her in a quiet, blue February dusk, sitting with a book in her *bergère* by the window overlooking the haunted park. She is absorbed and detached from the world, in the way only a lover of books can be, and she smiles a little wistfully as she reads in an old Spanish romance of the lover who jousted for his mistress, and kept vigil for her during many a weary year, for the sole reward of a glance from her lovely eyes. Ah, that was long ago. . . .

## CHAPTER XXI

### POMPADOUR DABBLES IN POLITICS

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*Secret conference at Babiole about Austrian Alliance. Pompadour's beauty fading, she desires fame in other directions. Women in that century dabbling in politics. Frederick of Prussia slights Pompadour. The marquise de Coislin plans to filch her political role. Antipathy between Frederick and Louis. Vindication of the latter. Catholic alliance against North. Empress Maria-Theresa flatters the marquise through Kaunitz her ambassador. Bernis' upright principles as a diplomat. Writing desk. Eccentricities and shrewdness of Kaunitz. French armies sent to assist Austria. Intrigues to replace d'Estrées by Soubise. Morfil. Richelieu's treachery. Convention of Closter-Severn. Defeat of Rosbach. Financial situation. Bernis tries to end war. Pompadour's anger. Bernis made a cardinal and exiled. Replaced by Choiseul. Silhouette. Character of Choiseul. Pacte de Famille. Pitt's dismissal. Peace of Paris. Louis' statue unveiled. Jeers of prostitutes.*

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*"The marquise "carried touchiness about the respect due to her, to the point of ridicule". (BERNIS.)*

*"The comte de Saint-Germain said to Louis XV: "Sire, you saw the fog a few days ago: one could not see four steps ahead." He did not fear to add: "Kings (I am speaking generally) are surrounded by even thicker fogs, which intriguers and unfaithful ministers create around them: and everybody in every class agrees to make the King see things under an aspect other than the true one." CASANOVA DE SEINGALT.*

On September 22nd, 1755, after the sun had set behind a dark bank of cloud, the marquise de Pompadour slipped out of a French window on the ground floor of Bellevue and walked in the gloaming to a little house called Babiole (or Bauble) at the bottom of the garden. It was also

## YAWLING FISHWIVES

called Le Taudis or The Hovel, and it was there that her guests had taken refuge from the smoky chimneys of Bellevue. She tried not to appear as if she were hurrying down the avenue of sepulchral yews, lest some servant peering from an attic window suspect the cause of her agitation, and start some malevolent chatter in the kitchens. The cedars, mute of bird or whispering wind, stretched out their boughs in a yawning melancholy. No sunset drenched their branches, but only the cold, relentless drizzle. The silence, lacking either the balm of the closing year or the sweet peace which comes after rain, seemed rather the hush in a haunted house before some deed of horror. A solitary iron-grey streak in the west lit up the face of Pompadour, the faded, tired complexion nearly smothered under its mask of white and red. Her enemies said that her birdlike vivacity was now a grimace: one could only recognize her by her large, fine eyes; they wore a look of tragedy.

The fishwives had been yawling:

*La gorge molle et fanée,  
Le bras maigre et décharné,  
Les doigts faits en araignée,  
Et le ventre en falbala,  
La cuisse platte et menue,  
La jambe d'une venue,  
Que termine un pied de grue  
Le bel objet que voila,  
Hi! hi! hi! Ha! Ha! Ha!*

A rook cawing at her approach made the demoniac laughter of these harridans reverberate in her ears. She drew her cloak more closely around her and glanced furtively on either side. "Tis true," she murmured, "my beauty is faded. My name will be forgotten. What can I do to escape this terrible oblivion?"

## POMPADOUR DABBLES IN POLITICS

Pompadour had made an assignation to meet Bernis and the Austrian minister Stahremberg in order to discuss the new alliance with Austria. Up till now, Austria had always been the natural enemy of France; royal favourites have a way of upholding or inaugurating a political régime, and the duchesse de Châteauroux had always supported this traditional attitude. In the eighteenth century it was the fashion for woman to dabble in politics. Under the name of Araminte she is caricatured in *Le Tableau du siècle*: she is seen coming out of her study with a harassed, busy look which she would be very pleased for everybody to notice. She pretends she is overwhelmed with correspondence and tells the porter not to admit anyone save those in highly polished cabriolets. This supremacy of a woman's influence unconsciously affected the men. Bernis' diplomatic dispatches (he had been made ambassador to Venice) acquired 'des mots de ruelles', chatty familiarities, and all the care-free graces and little poses of woman's speech. The classic example of the feminine touch in politics is Pompadour marking the different positions in a battle plan with patches out of her patchbox. And now she was arranging a Holy Alliance of Austria and France (and later Spain) to counterbalance the forces of the North—Russia, Prussia and England—England which she called the Attila of the North. Maria-Theresa, Empress of Austria (and future mother of Marie-Antoinette), had heard that Frederick the Great of Prussia had insulted Pompadour by nicknaming her 'Petticoat the fourth' and by saying to Voltaire, who was transmitting Pompadour's respects to him: 'I do not know her.' So with consummate shrewdness, knowing her susceptibilities and the touchy self-love of this little *bourgeoise*, the Empress had given instructions to her representatives in France to pay their court to her, and to try to get her to secure Louis' assistance against Frederick.

Pompadour was flattered. How different were the messages



MARIE LECZINSKA, WIFE OF LOUIS  
XV, IN LATER LIFE  
From a painting by Nattier in the Musée de Versailles  
*Photograph : W. F. Mansell*

## JEALOUSY

of the two monarchs. Frederick said: 'I do not think that the King of Prussia need be circumspect towards a *demoiselle* Poisson, particularly if she is arrogant and lacking in the respect due to crowned heads.' He actually nicknamed his lap-dog, which slept in his bed, Pompadour.

On the other hand, Maria-Theresa assured her through her ambassador 'of all the regards she could desire'.

A Court intrigue precipitated Pompadour's decision to adopt her new political role. She heard that a rival, the beautiful marquise de Coislin, who had behaved insolently towards her once at a card party, was also devoted to the cause of Austria. She found out that she was being thrown into the King's path by the hateful prince de Conti, who wanted to use her as an instrument serving his own ends. Pompadour had scotched his little plot by violating the secret of the posts<sup>1</sup> and showing to Louis a letter from an old parliamentary councillor in which he deplored the haughtiness, extravagance and avidity of the Coislin. This had the desired effect on Louis, who, as Pompadour knew, 'would sign without thinking for a million and would give with difficulty a hundred louis from his private purse'. Pompadour could not have borne to see another woman trying to take from her the initiative of her plans.

Thenceforward she embarked seriously on strengthening the natural antipathy that existed between Frederick and Louis. In Louis' eyes, Frederick was heavy, brutal, vain, malicious and coarse, while Louis, on the surface at least, always had the dignity and elegance of the man of breeding. A man of depraved morals himself, Frederick had the effrontery to ridicule Louis in every way, and to pay French writers to write dreadful pamphlets about his private life. He cast in

<sup>1</sup> Half a dozen clerks opened letters at the post-office, took an impression of the seals and copied the contents of letters. Every Sunday, the post-office steward brought the letters to the King and Madame de Pompadour.



his teeth the reproach of the millions he squandered on his mistresses, when he had ruined himself for the dancer, Barberina Campanini. He hurled all manner of insults at the French army: his own men were driven to battle with terrible brutality, like human cattle. Someone has suggested that Louis thought an alliance of the two great Catholic powers against the Protestants redeemed his personal sins and exempted him from the fear of punishment. Henri Martin says: 'He was persuaded that a King who sustained the cause of the Church could not be damned for his private sins. He dreamed of a Holy War from the recesses of the Parc aux Cerfs. In an essay in *Portraits du Dix-Huitième Siècle* entitled 'Le Vrai Caractère de Louis XV' Pierre de Nolhac makes a splendid vindication of Louis as a diplomatist. He is convinced that Pompadour was 'a confidante rather than a counsellor' in political matters, and that the King really went his own way, in spite of her. (In fact, we know from other sources that he kept up secret diplomatic correspondences in which he attempted to revoke some of the ills she had caused. Pompadour knew nothing about it, but suspected something: so one day she gave him an opiate and stole the key of his desk.)

Unlike Louis XIV, Louis did not love war: at Fontenoy he had turned to the Dauphin and, pointing to all the carnage of battle, said that one must never make war 'par magnificence'. He always complained that he lacked men. That is why it is impossible to blame him entirely for this disastrous Seven Years War. France was doomed already, there was decay in the army, the navy, the state: there was no administrative genius like Cardinal Richelieu or Napoleon. Thieving was common both to servant and noble—Maurepas, for instance, as *ministre de marine*, had embezzled the funds for the navy, and it was rapidly falling into decay. The de Gonscourts, apart from laying on Pompadour all the blame for the bankruptcy and the bloodshed of Europe, think that this

## ALLIANCE WITH AUSTRIA

programme 'was in its essence a wise, profitable and expedient idea for France. Richelieu, Mazarin, Henri IV and Louis XIV had all tried to enclose the Emperor Charles-Quint into limits whence he could no more endanger the equilibrium of Europe. There was in the eighteenth century the new danger of warlike little Prussian states springing up on the map of Europe without natural frontiers, and seeking a place in Germany. . . .' Furthermore, the Austrian alliance would be a means of intimidating the English, who were envious of the French colonies, which they needed for their trade, and bubbling to declare war on any pretext.

Maria-Theresa, who had conceived a singular inclination for Louis XV and anything French, saw at a glance that her hopes rested with Pompadour. On May 13th, 1756, Stahremberg had written to Kaunitz saying that the Empress should enclose some personal compliments to Pompadour: 'It is certain that it is to her that we owe everything, and it is to her that we should look for everything in the future. She desires respect, and indeed she deserves it.' Through her ambassador Kaunitz Maria-Theresa flattered the secret inclinations of the favourite and pushed her in the direction of her desires—to a reign of wider scope than that which had been afforded in the bedchamber.

Someone has said that 'the prejudices of man come from the mind and may be overcome; the prejudices of woman come from the heart and are impregnable'. This is true of Bernis, who was swept up into the affair. It is unjust to say that he had come into it through personal pique against Frederick because the Prussian had waxed ironical on the subject of his little rhymes:

*Bernis est-ce assez de victimes?  
Et les mépris d'un roi pour vos petites rimes  
Vous semblent-ils assez vengés?*

## POMPADOUR DABBLES IN POLITICS

We know Bernis' trusty and upright character and how, at his own risk, he courageously urged Pompadour at the end to give up this disastrous war. It is therefore important to exculpate him at the very beginning from too great a share of the blame.

Bernis was a born diplomat: he had the depth of a dual personality, affecting frivolity in his dispatches, going to suppers and balls, and yet all the time secretly hard at work, confiding in no one, stealing time from sleep in order to work without arousing suspicion. He had finesse, tact, that delicate handling of individuals so necessary in diplomacy, personal charm, gaiety, felicity of phrase, even modesty and good sense. His support of Pompadour at the beginning is the strongest vindication she could have had, if anyone were to seek it: this man who came from an old and illustrious French family, and who had been too honest to become a priest without a vocation, was incapable of entering a course of action which he knew to be wrong, however profitable it might be to himself.

Bernis had spoken of Pompadour's self-love, too easy to flatter and to wound. The great Empress had tactfully enquired through Stahremberg as to what would give her most pleasure. He found out that she coveted a writing desk of a certain kind much liked at the time by the ladies of Paris. This little *bourgeoise*, daughter of Monsieur Fishy, was quite fluttered! The Empress ordered a desk to be made, encrusted with lacquer and adorned with a miniature of herself surrounded by precious stones. This desk, costing 77,000 livres, has disappeared, but the miniature, which Pompadour had detached from this toy (as it reminded people of her part in the war), reappeared in a very interesting way. At the sale of Pompadour's belongings after her death, the miniature was marked down as 'The Empress, Mother of the Queen of France': a lady-in-waiting of Marie-Antoinette, thinking it would give her pleasure, bought it and presented it to her. But this gift did

## THE FOP MASKS THE DIPLOMAT

not please her at all—probably she realized that Pompadour had been (indirectly) instrumental in making her Queen of France.

As Kaunitz played such an important part in this tragedy, it is necessary to say something about him. Pompadour wrote to her brother: 'He is said to be charming, and seems to be a very polished person.' In May 1756, by the Treaty of Versailles, a first subsidy of 24,000 Frenchmen was promised to Austria. On September 7th following, Pompadour wrote to Kaunitz, congratulating him on the 'success of the treaties concluded' and adding a postscript about a portrait of herself which he had asked for. He replied on October 10th: '... We are very near the consummation of the greatest undertaking which has ever come from any Cabinet of Europe ...' and added a postscript which reveals him entirely.

'P.S. Doubtless, Madame, you are not aware it is with the most cruel impatience that I await the charming portrait for which that unkind M. de La Tour has made me languish for so long past. Release me from my torment then, I implore you, grant me the favour of sending it to me as soon as possible. I kiss your hands with the most profound respect.

'LE COMTE DE KAUNITZ-RITTEBERG.'

What exquisite manners! He was the most affected, supercilious, precious little creature imaginable. He used the yolk of an egg as a cure for sunburn, and it needed no less than four valets to puff superfine powder on to his wig, and that had to be done at a distance, so that only the finest grains of powder would reach the wig. He affected valetudinarian habits—about which Carlyle has given a few high-sounding literary sniffs: 'King of vanished Shadows. A determined hater of Fresh Air; made the very Empress shut her windows when he came to audience; fed cautiously daring on boiled capons.' Yet underneath this mask of eccentricities and foppishness he was endowed with wonderful discretion and tenacity of purpose; and he was crafty. Pompadour realized this, for she

## POMPADOUR DABBLES IN POLITICS

quoted the story of Alcibiades and the dog's tail to show how Kaunitz always diverted attention from something he wished to conceal. There was a curious affinity between them, for this weird creature with the upturned nose and the downcast lids was very affable to artists, musicians and literary men, and, like Pompadour, he had a passion for building, pulling down, altering and repairing his houses.

At the outset of the war, Austria had a passing moment of fear lest her plans fail through the overthrow of Pompadour at the time of the attempted assassination of the King by Damiens, January 5th, 1757; but as soon as Louis had recovered from his slight wound and was delivered from the fear of Death and Hell, he returned to Pompadour, and bloodshed began again in earnest. But with this difference—Machault and d'Argenson, the two ablest ministers, had been dismissed for their intrigues against Pompadour. The removal of the heads of the army and navy on the eve of a great continental and maritime war was the very height of folly. Indeed, reading the accounts of battles, and the stories of how generals were elected during that time, one sees that everyone was out for his own ends, and that private quarrels affected European events as never before. Generals could be bought by the enemy; private ambitions and feuds came before loyalty to the French flag. Added to that, there was at the time terrible trouble with a Parliament which wanted to raise money from the clergy, and a clergy which, refusing to submit, caused a minor revolution.

At the end of 1756, Benedict XIV issued an Encyclical *De Omnibus* in which he sought to reconcile the clergy and Parliament. On December 13th, the King held a *Lit de Justice* in which he forbade members of Parliament to command the clergy in matters relating to the administration of the Sacraments. At the same time he suppressed many of the parliamen-

POMPADOUR FLUTTERS A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT  
tary offices. The streets were full of angry murmurs in which Pompadour was called 'the King's slut'. In all the troubled times that followed, during which she was accused of depriving the King of the counter-balance of Parliament and of turning the monarchy into despotic power, Voltaire came to her assistance by ridiculing the clerical party with a peppering of epigrams and pamphlets.

The most striking instance of Pompadour's interference in politics at that time occurs on January 26th of the following year, 1757, in her famous talk with the *président de Meinières*. She wanted to force him to influence Parliament to greater submissiveness and she hoped to do this, both by persuasion, and by dangling before him the hope of securing a much coveted promotion for his son. She summoned him to Versailles for six o'clock in the evening. The whole conversation as reported by the *président* himself is too long to quote. She completely dazzled him by her eloquence, her wonderful knowledge of parliamentary history and the clarity with which she recalled dates and facts. One moment she made her voice sound caressing and insinuating, the next it was proud and dictatorial. Describing her skill as a talker, someone has said: 'Suddenly she covers the argument of her adversary with the inspired reply of a great orator.' Always finding the right words, in tones of irony, in exclamations and interpolations, she tried to show the astonished *président* that the King must be separated from his ministers and that a personal rather than a representative will must be attributed to him. The whole scene as described by the *président* is drawn from life. Here is a part of it:

'Alone, standing up near the fire, she looked at me with an air of hauteur which will remain imprinted on my memory all my life; holding her head up straight without bowing, she looked me up and down in the most imposing fashion in the world!'

## POMPADOUR DABBLES IN POLITICS

At the close of the interview, Pompadour said farewell to the président, who had been fascinated but unshaken; and as her power of argument, supported by her thorough acquaintance with history, had both failed, she finally attempted the seduction of pathos and said:

'I see I will gain nothing by arguing with you. None the less I sympathize with you in your trouble: I have been a mother and I know what it must cost you to leave your son in that state!'

It speaks well for the strength of the man's political convictions that he did not give in. He proudly declared to Pompadour that he wanted to place in the King's service 'the son of a man of honour and not the son of a dishonoured man', and that he would feel very uncomfortable if he ceded to her wishes: he would rather become a Capucin friar.

At last three French armies were sent across the Rhine, of which one was commanded by the maréchal d'Estrées. Kaunitz wrote gratefully to Pompadour, saying he knew 'the elevation of her soul and the lively interest she takes in the glory of the King and the happiness of France'. Stahremberg wrote to Kaunitz in this same month of June (1757):

'I only came back from Versailles at 2 o'clock after midnight, having been kept back to supper by Mme de Pompadour, where one drank very heartily to the health of S.M. l'Impératrice.'

Instead of d'Estrées, Pompadour wanted one of her friends, the prince de Soubise, to lead the army. Though upright, he was full of overweening assurance: he had charmed her by promising to conquer and assuring her that his victories would cover her with reflected glory. From that moment, a pinprick war was begun against d'Estrées, who could not be openly replaced by Soubise without infuriating all the marshals of France, for the latter was younger than any of them.

## CONVENTION OF CLOSTER-SEVERN

Pompadour planned to patch up a reconciliation with *maréchal Richelieu*, who was a brilliant soldier, and make him the general of transition before *Soubise*. The gossip of all this reached the ears of *d'Estrées'* loyal wife: she was furious, and eventually it was she who unwittingly caused her husband's downfall by her indiscretions and the sarcasms she hurled at the royal mistress. She even went so far as to slip into the *Parc aux Cerfs* when the King was not there and urge *Morfil* to help her overthrow this woman who was ruining her husband's career. *Morfil* said to *Louis* one day, rather mockingly: 'But on what terms are you, then, with your precious old girl?' *Louis* was very angry and forced her to confess that it was *Madame d'Estrées* who had taught her to speak like that.

*D'Estrées* was immediately recalled, and the command given over to *Richelieu*. Calamity ensued. *Frederick* flattered *Richelieu* into accepting the disastrous Convention of *Closter-Severn* (September 10th, 1757) by calling him the 'nephew of the great cardinal *Richelieu*'. The French, in an act of mistaken generosity, trusted to *Frederick's* word of honour not to carry arms when instead they should have made the *Prussians* prisoners of war. A satirical engraving of the time shows *d'Estrées* whipping the Duke of Cumberland with a laurel branch, of which *Richelieu* picks up the leaves and makes a crown. *Loménie de Brienne* tells us that *Bernis* was walking up and down in his room waiting for the fatal news of disarmament, 'Unhappy posterity,' he muttered to himself. Just then he heard an officer who brought the news of the Convention announcing his arrival by cracking his whip at the door. *Bernis* sighed: 'The dream is ended.'

More disasters ensued. Bribed by *Frederick*, and indeed with no other ambition in this war but to plunder and steal, *Richelieu* allowed the wretched *Soubise* to lose the battle of *Rosbach* in November 1757. *Soubise* had not wanted to engage upon the battle at all after examining the enemy's



## POMPADOUR DABBLES IN POLITICS

position, but he was under the prince de Hilburghausen, who had been bought by Frederick. Hilburghausen set his army on the move without consulting Soubise, and he was forced to follow.

In spite of all the furious couplets or *Soubisades* which rained down on his head when he returned, Louis did not blame his general. Soubise was not ungrateful: seventeen years later, when Louis died, he was the only one of all his many courtiers who followed his coffin to burial.

Frederick had vanquished all Richelieu's hesitations by assuring him that Pompadour's charms had faded and that her day would soon be over. When Pompadour heard the news of his defeat, this 'second Agincourt', she burst into tears.

Madame du Hausset writes: 'Never was the public so inflamed against Madame de Pompadour as when news arrived of the battle of Rosbach. Every day she received anonymous letters full of the grossest abuse, atrocious verses, threats of poison and assassination. She continued long a prey to the most acute grief, and could obtain no sleep save from opiates. All this discontent was excited by her protection of the prince de Soubise, and the lieutenant of police had great difficulty in allaying the ferment of the people.'

This would have been the moment to bring the war to a close before any more tragedies could take place. The country was tottering towards financial ruin and the drain on the manhood was terrible. Bernis now decided to persuade Pompadour to stop. He showed her that in the long run the English, superior on the sea, would take away the French colonies, which were the foundation of exterior commerce and the abundant source of the country's riches. Pompadour remained adamant. Peace to her would have been a humiliating acknowledgment of defeat, of the failure of her political influence, a

## FINANCIAL RUIN

blow to her pride. With all the unreasonable passion of a woman, she refused to listen to Bernis' arguments. On December 17th of that year she wrote to Kaunitz: 'I hate the conqueror more than ever . . . let us pulverize the Attila of the North. . . .' Four days later, after the news of yet another defeat, she wrote: '. . . every lofty soul braces itself against disaster. . . . Such is my manner of thinking, Monsieur le Comte. . . .'

So with high-sounding heroics in the vein of Corneille's heroines, she closed her ears to the angry groans of mothers who had lost their sons, of wives who had lost their husbands: she expected to find in the nation all the desperate determination which she herself had displayed for so long in the maintenance of her own favour, and Bernis talked in vain. Tortured by the uneasiness of an honest man who sees himself involved in his country's ruin, he wrote: 'It seems to me that I am Minister for Foreign Affairs for Limbo.' Of his effect on Pompadour he said: 'I excite a little quickening of the pulse, then lethargy sets in again: she looks with her great, sad eyes, and everything is said.'

It was finally the financial situation which brought Bernis' panic to a crisis. In June 1758 he obtained from the Comptroller-General a communication on the state of finances. Horrified, he rushed to Pompadour and told her that they were bringing ruin on the whole nation, and that all the present disgrace would be imputed to them both. Pompadour flew into a frightful rage to find Bernis, hitherto so docile, suddenly showing a will of his own. He threatened to retire unless she managed to persuade Louis to end the war. She said it was very ungrateful of him to speak like that after all the favours he had received.

When Louis came to see her, she treacherously did all she could to undermine his trust in Bernis: in this she was so successful that when Louis came to the Council meeting he

## POMPADOUR DABBLES IN POLITICS

was quite prepared to turn a deaf ear to all Bernis' warnings. However, Bernis, upheld by the whole Council and the Dauphin, finally won the day and was authorized to negotiate with Vienna. Pompadour, devoured with jealousy and fear of this new Bernis who was even going so far as to suggest reforms in the royal expenditure, determined to put her old friend quietly out of the way. She suggested that he should be given the cardinal's hat, knowing Louis' rooted distrust of clerical interference in politics. Louis was ever mindful of men like the cardinals Richelieu, Mazarin and Fleury. He had said: 'Whenever there is a cardinal in the Council, he is sure to take the lead in the end.'

Bernis had no illusions about this honour, not even when the great day came and Louis said as he placed the cardinal's hat on his head: 'I have never made so fine a cardinal.' Bernis said to someone else who was congratulating him on the hat: 'It would be better if you called it a good umbrella.' He awaited disgrace from day to day. Fearing exile, he said pitifully to her who had been his friend for so long and whose praises he had sung so charmingly in the springtime of her beauty: 'To separate early on, nothing could be simpler and easier . . . but why a dagger thrust?' She did not reply.

Pompadour read extracts, out of context, from a memorandum which Bernis had written and which he had asked her to give to the King. She did this in such a way as to make Bernis seem ambitious to take the lead, as if he were dictating a plan of action. ('There are few examples of equal vileness,' he wrote of this.) The result was that on November 1st, 1758, Louis exiled to his abbey of St. Médard of Soissons the only churchman he had ever sincerely loved and who, in his turn, was absolutely devoted to him. He had complained that throughout his reign he lacked men: rarely had he been served by one so discreet, so gentle and so true. The cardinal's hat was indeed more than an umbrella; it was a snuffer.

## ON THE RACK OF SLEEPLESSNESS

Many months later Pompadour was ill. She was tended through the long night watches by du Hausset, and in the manner of those whose sad insight is sharpened by the slow rack of sleeplessness she spoke in a low voice of the friendships she had lost on the way. As if in echo to some interior reproach, she said: 'And last I think of one whose society I would have enjoyed; I would have grown old with an amiable friend of long standing.'

Now came the reign of an infinitely dangerous man, that Monsieur de Stainville who, as we know, had bought his favour with Pompadour some time ago, by betraying the confidences of his cousin Madame de Choiseul and revealing to Pompadour that she was plotting to become the King's mistress. This one deed, almost at the outset of his career, gives the measure of the man. When Bernis' fall from favour was being manœuvred with great subtlety, he was French ambassador at Vienna. He had been heard to say of Bernis: 'Oh, as for that one, he does not worry me a jot. I could soon make him lose his reputation with *her* [Pompadour] if I wished.' He secretly left the part of the minister to follow the ideas of the favourite: he assured his own fortunes in the future by reviving and flattering the vanquished hopes of both the Empress and Pompadour. He had been all in favour of giving Bernis the cardinal's hat. Bernis had been exiled on November 1st. On December 28th Stainville was created 'duc de Choiseul et pair de France'.

The following year, 1759, the budget was as follows:

*Revenues:* Two hundred and eighty-five million livres.

*Expenditure:* Five hundred and three million livres.

*Deficit:* Two hundred and eighteen million livres.

*In addition:* One hundred and fifty million livres due to receivers-general and farmers-general.

## POMPADOUR DABBLES IN POLITICS

Nobody subscribed to loans or lotteries any more because the Government had lost all credit. In February the Comptroller-General Boulogne resigned in despair, and Louis engaged the services of the wily Monsieur de Silhouette. This man enriched the Treasury by 72 million livres by creating a loan to that amount, confiscating half the profits of the farmers-general and distributing the money among the subscribers! There was universal applause as the farmers-general were greatly hated. Silhouette cut down pensions. This was very good as it did not affect the general public. He asked the King to surrender the annual sum set apart for his card playing. Louis assented because Choiseul had secretly offered to make it up from the funds of the Foreign Office! There was chaos: the expenses of one department were thrown upon another. The King drew millions every year from the Treasury to his privy purse, and never gave any account. Since Machault's dismissal in 1757 Louis had taken for himself the post of Keeper of Seals in order to appropriate the perquisites.

Silhouette levied taxes on servants, livery, horses, carriages, shops, coffee-houses, bachelors. The royal plate was sent to the Mint. Pompadour gave hers. The Dauphiness sent an exquisite and costly silver toilet table. The clergy of Notre-Dame, when asked how much they would give, said: 'Everything except the sacred vessels.' The contributions were printed in gazettes and there was jealous emulation—a form of snobbery. But Silhouette went too far. He suggested that the State should suspend all payments save those for bankruptcy: this was ridiculous, and he was dismissed on November 2nd. In the world of fashions, trousers without pockets and dresses without flounces were called *à la Silhouette*. *Silhouette* became a word for a mere outline of vacant black. He himself retired in opulence and used plate when the nobles had to be content with china and earthenware.

In spite of this little interlude and its consequences on the

## BENEDICT XIV AND CHOISEUL

maintenance of the army, Choiseul carried on with his views. Here is the man in a nutshell: red hair, scintillating eyes, upturned nose; manners a blend of exquisiteness and audacity, terribly malicious, full of cruel banter. His policy was to show how dangerous it would be to make an enemy of him. He was a great success with women, particularly with Pompadour, whom he pretended to love passionately. Benedict XIV said of him: 'A very intelligent madman.' When Choiseul had gone to Rome and began dictating to the Pope, Benedict XIV got up from his throne, seized Choiseul and threw him on to it, saying, 'Be Pope yourself!'

He was so frivolous that the smallest excuse could make him violate state secrets. The baron de Gleichen had said that his lack of discretion resulted from his effervescent high spirits and love of joking: 'Never have I met a man who knew as he did how to spread joy and contentment around him. When he came into a room, he thrust his hands into his pockets and seemed to take out of them an inexhaustible abundance of jokes and gaiety.' He never kept his word, and his love of pleasure was so strong that he confessed himself he could not sacrifice to it even the affairs of France. He had that marvellous gaiety and equability of temper which seems to be the mask of many men of that century. He made Louis respect him by behaving with all the hauteur of very old families. He was supported by many important relations, and most of all by his sister the duchesse de Grammont, who usurped his wife's place in her own home. He was clever enough to found his reign on the applause of men of letters, philosophers, Jansenists and members of Parliament. Truly he was the very man to bring the hour of the Revolution nearer. He was so popular and so powerful that his dismissal, engineered later on by Madame du Barry, almost necessitated a *coup d'état*, and all the courtiers were for ever after flocking to Chanteloup, near Amboise, his magnificent country seat,

## POMPADOUR DABBLES IN POLITICS

where every night his steward Lesueur, after casting a glance around the *salons*, would set a palatial table for fifty, sixty, eighty guests. We can see him, in the little *gouache* of Blarenberg (1766), showing off the treasures in his marble-paved picture gallery to some pretty women. His head is thrown back with superb insolence; he is wearing red trousers.

His first act as minister, on December 30th, 1758, had been to involve the King more deeply in war by promising to maintain in Germany an army of 100,000 men. For two years the usual losses ensued through private jealousies and bickerings among the generals. Choiseul's last resource against being forced into an ignominious peace by Pitt was to balance the Alliance of the North, by a more formidable alliance of the South: he drew the King of Spain into the war by the *Pacte de Famille* signed on August 15th, 1761. By a secret clause of this, the King of Spain pledged himself to declare war against England on the following May 1st if peace had not been concluded with her by that date.

Fortunately, Pitt's dismissal and the complete financial exhaustion of France prevented so great a disaster. On February 10th of the following year (1762) the Peace of Paris was signed—humiliating enough for France, for she surrendered Canada and Cape Breton and gave up all claims to Nova Scotia. Thus ended the Seven Years War.

At Pompadour's suggestion, a colossal equestrian statue of Louis by Bouchardon was unveiled in the *place* which is now the place de la Concorde. At the four corners of the pedestal were four allegorical figures by Pigalle—Strength, Wisdom, Justice, Peace. The unveiling was done with great ceremony on June 20th, 1763. The *Gazette de France* for the 27th, quoted in Barbier's *Journal*, says that the ceremony was received 'with enthusiastic acclamations of joy on the part of enormous crowds'. In reality, there was a deadly silence.

## PROSTITUTES AND THE PEACE STATUE

The next morning a couplet was found affixed to the statue:

*Grotesque monument, infâme piédestal,  
Les Vertus sont à pied et le Vice à cheval.*

La Tour heard the street prostitutes saying about the Virtues: 'Do you see how the King has made them put his wantons by the side of his procuress? Look, there is Madame de Mailly, and there's Madame de Vintimille, and the one behind her is Madame de Châteauroux, and next to her is Madame de Pompadour!'

Thirty years later the King's grandson Louis XVI was guillotined in the place de la Concorde.



## CHAPTER XXII

### DAMIENS AND THE DOWNFALL OF D'ARGENSON

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*Attempt to murder Louis. Damiens racked. Louis' temporary repentance. Anxiety of Pompadour. D'Argenson plans her dismissal. Uses Machault as a screen. Pompadour discovers his plot to make comtesse d'Esparbès the King's mistress. Declares war. D'Argenson's insolence. Pompadour has the vapours. D'Argenson dismissed.*

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*The King once asked the old bishop of Amiens, a holy man, to pray for him: 'Sire,' replied the bishop, 'I pray for your Majesty every day: from the depths of my heart I implore God to give you a grace which I myself would obtain for you at the price of my blood.'*

*'Continue to pray for it,' said the King.*

ON January 5th, 1757, at the outset of the war and in the midst of all the trouble with the Archbishop and Parliament, a startling attempt on the King's life greatly endangered Pompadour's position and made her begin to wish she had taken the part of retiring gracefully into repentant obscurity some time ago. Why had she not done so at the end of 1755, she said to herself, when she had been staging a religious conversion in order to obtain the post of lady-in-waiting to the Queen—a position which was to be the crown of her career? This strange ambition can be explained by the well-known fact that a woman's desire to be respected increases with the dwindling of her respectability.

It was the vigil of the Epiphany—the Feast of Kings—and the poor people in the countryside were baking the traditional cakes or *galettes* resembling big yellow moons. In the

## ATTEMPT TO MURDER LOUIS

evening, at six o'clock, Louis was coming down the steps of the marble court by torchlight, on his way to the coach which was to take him to the Grand Trianon, where he would celebrate the feast. Quite a small crowd had collected to see him go. On the last step, he felt himself being struck on the right side and exclaimed, 'Someone has hit me with his elbow.' There was, quite near, a middle-aged man in a brown suit and coat. The Dauphin, noting that he wore a hat well over his forehead while everybody else was uncovered, said to him sharply: 'Do you not see the King?' A member of the bodyguard snatched his hat off. In the meantime the King, putting his hand to his right side, found it covered in blood. He said: 'I have been struck! It is that man. Arrest him but do not harm him.' Damiens<sup>1</sup> was seized and searched: they found the penknife, four inches long, with which he had attempted to kill the King. The guards took him away and started scorching his feet to find out whether he had any accomplices.

The King was carried back into the palace: there were no servants about and no linen either for the bed or for the staunching of the blood. The wound was slight—a mere scratch—as the thickness of Louis' clothing had broken its full force. But the shock to his nerves had been severe. The

<sup>1</sup> François Damiens was a demented lackey out of a job. His father used to hang him up by the feet when he was a boy in order to crush the evil tendencies of his nature. He had formerly been a servant in the house of a councillor of the Paris Parliament, and his imagination had been excited by the denunciations of the King overheard at his master's table. The poor devil was tortured at the place de Grève. I do not propose to give details of this harrowing scene. A certain beautiful Madame de Préandeau had hired two places at a window for a louis and she played cards while waiting for the racking to begin. When this was reported to Louis, he covered his face with his hands and said: 'Fi, la vilaine!' When they flogged the horses to make them tear Damiens limb from limb, she cried: 'Ah Jesus, the poor beasts, how I pity them!'

The eagerness of the women to watch this sight, their impassivity as compared with the shudderings and tears of the men onlookers, can only be explained by the fact that women in those days had themselves been hardened to the rack by enduring childbirth without alleviation.

## DAMIENS AND THE DOWNFALL OF D'ARGENSON

royal family took advantage of this, kept him in bed and fluttered around him in the hopes that now at last he would repent. Louis called for Père Desmarets, his Jesuit confessor, and made his confession, he begged the Queen's forgiveness for his infidelities, and held out his hand for all the peruked members of the medical faculty to take his pulse in turn. What a commotion!

Landsmath, a veteran soldier who had known Louis as a child, showed him the terrible scars on his own chest, saying: 'Look, I'm still alive!' He insisted on making Louis sit up.

'Those idiots have deceived you,' he said. 'In four days' time you should be hunting. As for the blade being poisoned, that's an old wives' tale. The poison, if any, would all have been rubbed off in the folds of your thick coat.' And he stumped off under the malevolent glances of the physicians, who thought he was doing them out of a livelihood.

During all this time, not a word, not a single reassuring note reached Pompadour from Louis. She was torn with anxiety, quite as much on her own account as on the King's. She only knew that the Dauphin, who hated her, now presided at the Council of State; and outside her window she heard the cries of the populace clamouring that she be put to death.

Soon a stream of so-called friends came to gloat over her with pitiless cruelty, though nominally the object of their visits was to sympathize. They were all devoured with curiosity as to what would be her next move. When she was at last left alone, her nerves gave way, she cried, fainted, then cried and fainted again. Bernis said: 'She threw herself into my arms with cries and sobs which would have softened even her enemies.' In spite of the fact that Bernis saw the King every day and spoke to him in whispers behind the bed-curtains, he never once heard him mention Pompadour's name: that was the chief cause of her despair. She kept



MADAME DE POMPADOUR

From a pastel study by Maurice Quentin de La Tour in  
the Musée St. Quentin

*Photograph : Bulloz*

## POMPADOUR ON THE BRINK OF A CHASM

recalling Metz, how the priests had been successful there and how the proud duchesse had been thrown out. She visualized herself languishing as a lady boarder in some dingy provincial convent, feeding her cat, repudiated and hissed at by everyone.

However, the King recovered. He said: 'Yes, the body is well, but *this* is sick', putting his hand to his head, 'and it is impossible to cure.' At this point d'Argenson saw his chance to strike a death blow at Pompadour, at the same time shielding himself behind his erstwhile enemy Machault and thus causing his downfall. The King had wished d'Argenson to be the one to tell Pompadour to go away for ever, but d'Argenson, seeing that the wound was slight and that Louis would go back to her, said that, as he had had the misfortune to displease Madame la marquise, it would be barbarous to have this order brought through an enemy's mouth. He suggested that Machault be trusted with the message, as he would soften the severity of the order by the consolations of friendship. He secretly hoped that this would spell the ruin of Machault, whom he loathed; and there was always the chance that the marquise might go—for if you poured enough salt on a leech it stopped sucking and rolled off.

Machault came into the beautiful closet of red lacquer where Pompadour was reclining on a sofa, looking very pale after being bled. His face was severe. 'How is Madame de Pompadour?' he asked in his characteristically icy tone. Everybody left the room. At the end of an hour she rang and Bernis came back to find her drowned in tears. 'I must go, my dear abbé,' she sobbed. Madame du Hausset made her drink a little orange-flower water in a silver goblet, as her teeth were chattering so hard that they would have broken any glass. Pompadour gave orders to her equerry to prepare her house in Paris and warned the coachman to be within call. She started her preparations for departure and closed her

door to all save her intimates. Her friend, the energetic little *maréchale* de Mirepoix, who had so often given her sensible advice, came in, and seeing all the trunks, exclaimed: 'What's all this?' Du Hausset was undressing Pompadour and putting her at ease in a *chaise-longue*.

'Alas, my dear friend,' replied Pompadour in dying tones, 'the master desires it, according to what Monsieur Machault told me.'

Then the *maréchale* replied in decided tones: 'Machault wants to be master, he betrays you. The first one to leave the field loses the game.'

After an hour's confabulation she decided to stay, pretending to go in order to deceive her enemies.

Docteur Quesnay, with many apish grimaces, recited the fable of the fox who, in the middle of eating with other animals, persuaded one of them that his enemies were looking for him, so that he could take his share in his absence.

Pompadour stayed; d'Argenson and Machault were dismissed; and all the dear friends hurried back to congratulate the marquise and to express hopes that this unfortunate little incident had not tired her unduly. It happened like this. The King, who by chance had cast a glance on the staircase leading to Pompadour's suite, had first gone away from it and then had been drawn back to it by that force of habit which was so strong in him. He came in. To his intense surprise, Pompadour received him with the utmost gentleness and did not utter one word of reproach. He was grateful to her, as he dreaded scenes.

The next day the marquise got into her post-chaise and had herself taken to Monsieur d'Argenson, to the great astonishment of her household. One of her spies had found a note, written by d'Argenson to the beautiful comtesse d'Esparbès, whom he wanted to throw in the King's path. He had rejected Pompadour's offer of conciliation through Bernis;

## A FOX OUTWITTED

though now she was determined to ruin him, the ostensible reason of her visit was to remonstrate with him for allowing extracts about the attempt of Damiens to be cut out from the posts and shown to the King. She herself had forbidden Janelle, the *intendant* of the post, to do this, and d'Argenson had flown into a violent passion and threatened to throw him into the Bastille if he took orders from Madame de Pompadour. She said to d'Argenson:

'I cannot conceive why you want to bring to the King's notice an event which must be so painful for him to remember.'

D'Argenson replied that he was surprised that Madame de Pompadour, who had no power to give orders, should meddle with a detail which was his business alone. Then Pompadour allowed the smouldering hatred of many years to burst into flame, and made the following declaration of war:

'Monsieur, I have long known the feelings you nurture about me, and I see clearly that nothing can change them. I do not know how all this will end, but what is certain is that either you or I must go.'

The baron de Besenval (1821) says in his memoirs that d'Argenson had only seen in these advances of Pompadour the last efforts of a drowning person who clings where she can.

Bernis was awaiting her at home. She stood leaning against the mantelpiece, looking very dreamily at the ceiling, still wearing her coat and with her hands in her muff. She remained without saying a word, quite absorbed in her own uneasy thoughts: '... Either you or I, either you or I...' And Louis was so devoted to d'Argenson and trusted him so completely!

Bernis said to her: 'You look like a dreaming sheep!'

She started, threw her muff down into a chair and said: 'It is a wolf which makes the sheep dream.'

When the King came again, he and Bernis remained alone

DAMIENS AND THE DOWNFALL OF D'ARGENSON

closeted in her room with her while du Hausset hovered anxiously outside the door. She heard sobs, the abbé came out and asked her for the *gouttes d'Hoffmann*. The King himself prepared the potion with sugar and presented it with charming grace to 'la belle éplorée'. Soon she smiled at him faintly, then she kissed his hands.

The next day d'Argenson received a *lettre de cachet* exiling him to his estates at des Ormes. Pompadour's resentment was implacable. Though she had feared very much for her own bad eyesight, she would never allow d'Argenson to come to Paris where he could find treatment for the blindness which threatened him. Hénault tells us he only came to Paris after her death, just in time to die there himself.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE TOMB

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*Story from Rétif de la Bretonne of a lover at the death-bed of his mistress. Fortune-teller's prophecy to Pompadour. Worry about money aggravates heart trouble. Favart's verses on her illness. She coughs blood. The gilded skeleton of the eighteenth century. Her pagan indifference. Receives Last Sacraments. Husband refuses to visit her. Sees Louis for the last time. Her memories on brink of grave. Impatient with priest. Dressed and painted. Her last words. Naked corpse seen on a bier.*

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‘ . . . . . nor with less dread the loud  
Ethereal trumpet from on high ’gan blow.’

(*Paradise Lost*. Book VI.)

‘Nothing creates more of a sensation with princes than when their equals are dying. Everybody talks about it, but as soon as they are dead, no one mentions it any more.’ (MADAME DU HAUSSET.),

**I**n *Monsieur Nicolas*, ou *Le Cœur humain dévoilé*, Rétif de la Bretonne describes how a man watched his mistress die in his arms:

‘I found my poor friend sunk in deep dejection: she breathed with difficulty. However, she smiled as she caught sight of me: she took my hand and said to me: “It is nothing.” I believed her. . . . She smiled at me again. They brought me what she had to take. She took it from my hand and drank it with a sort of avidity. I said that I would not leave her. . . . Zoé remained alone with me. . . . Directly we three were left alone, my young friend wanted to rest her head on my heart, and she said she breathed better. I opened my coat and placed her head on my breast. . . . She seemed to fall asleep. Perhaps

## THE TOMB

she grew weaker. She loved me so tenderly that her spirit, overflowing with love, felt suffering no longer. I remained like that: I was motionless, afraid of making the slightest movement. Towards three o'clock in the morning we wanted to make her take something. She could not swallow. Then Zoé, who knew the signs of the end, kissed me with animation and wanted to force me to put back my friend's head on the pillow. "No, no," I replied quickly. The dying woman looked at me. It was her last look. . . . She kissed my hand. I pressed my lips on her colourless lips. She gave a great sigh . . . which I breathed. . . . It was her soul. . . . She gave it all to me.'

The supreme consolation for a woman, of dying in her lover's arms, was denied the marquise de Pompadour.

When Choiseul saw her after the fatal treaty of Paris, he said to du Hausset: 'I fear, my good dame, that she will allow herself to be overcome by melancholy and will die of grief.' Pompadour had been in disguise to a fortune-teller and she said of this visit: 'The witch told me that I will have time to know myself, and I believe it, for I am dying of melancholy.'

In 1757 Pompadour had been so ill that she made her will. The complete breakdown of her health took place at Choisy in April 1764, accelerated largely by extreme worry about financial matters. She had tried to pay her debts by gaming and by selling some of her jewels and knick-knacks, but the deficit was so great that, when she fell ill, Collin her steward was obliged to borrow 70,000 livres. After her death the only ready money she left was thirty-seven louis in her writing table.

For some time past, she had never been able to pass the Queen's *appartement* without having palpitations of the heart. In April, when she was forty-two years of age, she had an inflammation of the lungs which further aggravated the heart trouble. She was obliged to remain in bed while Louis surrounded her with affectionate care. After a space, she

## ROUGE FOR DEATH

appeared to rally and was well enough to be moved to Versailles. Following a recent eclipse of the sun, Cochin had been asked to design a dial case for which Favart the poet wrote the following poem to celebrate the recovery of the marquise: it was never published.

*Le soleil est malade  
Et Pompadour aussi.  
Ce n'est qu'une passade,  
L'un et l'autre est guéri.  
Le bon Dieu qui seconde  
Nos vœux et notre amour,  
Pour le bonheur du monde  
Nous a rendu le jour  
Et Pompadour.*

The poets had always loved her: Palissot's rejoicings which began

*Vous êtes trop chère à la France,  
Au Dieu des arts et des amours,*

came too late: a foolish new physician, who did not know her as well as Quesnay, made her walk very quickly in her room and lift heavy weights. She had a severe relapse. Louis showed signs of being deeply moved and was always going down to her room. He found it difficult to recognize the Diana of the Court ball in this corpse-like woman seated in her *bergère*: as if by some macabre courtesy towards Death, she had dabbed a little rouge on her pallid cheeks, but nothing could hide her emaciation. Her cough suffocated her and she had not slept. The prince de Ligne's exquisite words on the face of an ageing woman—'Love has passed that way'—would not have befitted the marquise de Pompadour, who had compared her harrowed life to the perpetual combat of the Christian. A couplet once said of her:

## THE TOMB

*To market we hie  
The fish for to buy.*

Indeed, she looked more than ever like a dead fish: her sprightliness was now a grimace, her languor was weary exhaustion, the skin, fatigued by its thick masks of white and red, was livid and shiny. And what an unkindly look in those great sunken eyes! It is in her eyes that a woman's life story is written. Can ambition, pandering, suspicion, revenge and profound disillusion adorn a face with beauty? At last came the shadow of Death—the dreaded guest in that eighteenth century which was always so uniquely concerned with the present. The figure of Death never appeared on tombstones: the art of the time gilded the skeleton. The dread of nothingness, the breath of decay affrighted woman's elegance. 'Ah! Fie! Fie! let us talk of other things,' Madame du Deffand had cried when the subject was introduced. At his approach, Pompadour displayed philosophic indifference rather than Christian resignation. An immense lassitude seemed to possess her. She asked Louis whether she should receive a priest or die outside the Church—as if it were a matter of small moment, a mere social gesture. Louis XV advised her to see a priest. Even the *Bon Dieu* was treated with conventional *bon ton* in that century, as when a certain maid announced the arrival of the priest bringing the Sacred Host to her dying mistress in these terms: 'Madame la Duchesse, the *Bon Dieu* is here, may He be admitted? He wishes to have the honour of ministering to you.'

During the night of the 14th to the 15th of April, she prepared herself to receive those Sacraments which she had renounced for nineteen years or more. She sent for her husband. What a pang must have clutched her when they told her he would not come. She realized suddenly that she was utterly alone, for if she were making her last Confession during that

## LAST MEMORIES

night, she would see Louis no more. Farewell, farewell for ever to that fine face with the languid, caressing blue eyes, the voice humming Rameau's airs a little out of tune, the regal head, the proud bearing, the courtly grace.

They say that on the brink of the grave mortals, pausing for the last time, look back and recall the scenes of early life with especial vividness. As she prepared for her shriving that night, did the Marquise remember the thrill of her first meeting with Louis as she was driving the little blue carriage to Sénart, the masked ball—herself in Diana's robes—the first long days alone with her lover in the spring of 1745, the gay supper parties lasting till cock-crow, gossiping with their friends in her Attique du Nord, the lilac trees at Bellevue, her pretty dress painted with reeds and sea-shells when she had acted the part of Galatée . . . ? Or did more sinister remembrances bring their last blight—the shifty eyes of Madame d'Estrades, the mocking smiles of so many women, the dead body of her little girl Alexandrine, the stones hurled by the mob rattling against the windows of her coach during the Seven Years War, the veiled insolence of Maurepas and d'Argenson, the long, sleepless hours of illness and exhaustion when she knew her spell over Louis' heart was broken . . . ? The bleak dawn breaking over the hornbeams of the park streaked a face ravaged by tears of disillusion. She had surpassed all her wildest desires, overcome all her enemies. Had it been worth while? The dregs of the cup she found exceeding bitter. She had spent herself in the attaining of a girlish whim, a love, half ambition, half fantasy, insinuated into a frivolous mind by a Paris fortune-teller: and now her desire was got without content, for the lover had proved cold and treacherous and very secret.

The curé of the Madeleine broke into her regrets. The marquise found the ceremony of Extreme Unction long and tedious. She was utterly weary, and all this anointing of eyes

## THE TOMB

which had glanced at forbidden things, of lips which had spoken idle words, seemed to her very strange, very futile. She asked the curé to hurry: then, with sudden gentleness, begged forgiveness for her impatience. At length, the sunlight came with the heedless twitter of birds. It was April 15th, Palm Sunday. Slowly the myriad inhabitants of the vast palace resumed their tasks. The candles in the bedchamber of the marquise guttered in their sockets. On the floor above, Louis, sleepless, thought with regret of the woman who by her charming graces had saved him so often from the terrible demon of ennui. This was the fourth of his mistresses to die before him. Why had he been spared? Was he to be reserved for some more terrible doom?

The marquise had made her will some time ago: she ordered it to be brought to her and read aloud again: then, as she was too weak to hold a pen, she dictated a codicil to Collin. After that she received the visit of Janelle, the *intendant* of the Post Office: he always came on Sundays to show her any important secrets he had pilfered.

A little later, the weeping Dorine, now a tired woman of forty, made her mistress's toilette—a suspicion of powder on the hair, a smear of rouge on the cadaverous cheeks. . . . In those days corpses were laid out all rouged, and Dorine shuddered at the thought that this was perhaps the last time she would attire her mistress, whose bloom had been so exquisite, though of so brief a spell. Adorned for Death, in spite of great pain and breathlessness, she desired to see her three friends—Soubise, Choiseul and the gay Gontaut, now for the first time sad in her presence. They remained with her till evening. Then, in a whisper, she dismissed them gently:

'*That thing* draws near; leave my soul, my confessor and my women.' Very moved, they went out; the curé of the Madeleine remained near the dying woman who spoke to him for an instant or two. Just as he was getting up to go, she



LOUIS XV

From a pastel by Maurice Quentin de La Tour in the Louvre

*Photograph : W. F. Mansell*

## NAKED AND ALONE

tered those words which have something of the sad smile of  
gan antiquity: 'One moment, Monsieur le Curé, we will go  
gether.' He turned back. She was dead.

It was half-past seven that she went all alone into that ter-  
ble unknown of which she had never thought.

When the news was brought to him, Louis XV counter-  
anded the *grand couvert* or dinner in public.

That same evening, the comte Dufort de Cheverny, going  
to visit Madame de Praslin, who had lodgings in the palace,  
found her in tears.

'You see me very overcome,' she said, 'and if you had been  
here half an hour earlier, you would have shared my emotion.  
An hour ago I learnt of the death of Madame de Pompadour.  
He was not a personal friend of mine. But I had no cause of  
complaint against her. I saw two men go by carrying a hand-  
arrow. When they drew near (they passed under my win-  
dows), I saw the barrow contained a woman's body, covered  
only with a sheet, but so meagre that the shape of the head,  
the breasts, the stomach and the legs, showed through very  
distinctly. I sent someone to make enquiries. It was the body  
of that unhappy woman, which, in obedience to the strict law  
that no corpse may remain in the château, was being carried  
to her own house.'

Some time after the death of Pompadour, the marquise de  
Véran, who was a friend of Louis', was talking to him about his  
mistresses. She asked him whether he had ever been in love.  
He said: 'Yes, with Madame de Châteauroux.' 'And with  
Madame de Pompadour?' 'No,' he said, '*I never loved her.*'  
But you kept her for as long as she wanted?' 'Yes,' he replied,  
because it would have killed her to send her away.'

## FINIS

*Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*



# APPENDIXES

## APPENDIX A

### THE MOURNERS

---

THE body was first taken to Pompadour's house in Versailles; there it remained for two days in her bedroom transformed into a *chambre ardente* hung with black and lit by brown funeral tapers. At the end of two days, it was taken in the evening for a ceremony to the parish church of Notre-Dame, which is quite near the house. Then, in the twilight, the long procession of hired mourners following the hearse started on the road to Paris. A bill for funeral expenses reveals that the way was wild with lashing wind and rain. The hats of the retainers got blown off into the ditches, which were full of water, and it had grown too dark to recover them. No candle would stay alight: the black draperies billowed and tugged at first like evil spirits until they became sodden with rain.

'The marquise has chosen bad weather for her journey.' Historians wishing to blacken the character of Louis XV have quoted against him these words he is supposed to have said at six o'clock that evening, as he watched the convoy from his balcony overlooking the avenue de Paris. They have omitted to mention the account of Dufort de Cheverny, which reveals the grief of friendship, though perhaps not of love. The King ordered the door of his private closet to be shut, took his *valet de chambre* Champlost by the arm and went with him on to the balcony. Unmindful of the rain which was soaking his head and clothes, he strove through the gathering darkness to look at the hearse for the last time. It grew smaller and smaller in the distance. Then a speck and he could see it

## APPENDIX A

no more. . . . His eyes gazed blankly into the night. He came back out of the storm into the closet. Two large tears had fallen down his cheeks but he was so absorbed in his sorrow that he did not heed them. Champlost heard him murmur: 'These are the only respects I have been able to pay her. . . .'

The marquise de Pompadour had asked to be buried with her daughter in the vault of the Capucines' convent in Paris. A contemporary says cruelly that 'the great bones of the la Trémoille family were astonished to find near them the fish-bones of the Poissons'. The preacher was very embarrassed for his funeral oration. He began: 'I receive the body of the most high, most powerful lady, Madame la marquise de Pompadour, lady-in-waiting to the Queen. She was at the school of all the virtues, for the Queen is a model of kindness, piety, modesty and indulgence. . . .' So with great subtlety he embarked on a panegyric of Marie Leczinska.

The Parisians, in no way silenced by the mob, began singing satirical couplets:

*Ci-gît qui fut vingt ans pucelle,  
Sept ans catin et huit ans maq. . . .*

Another epitaph recalled the horrible insinuation of the famous quatrain of Maurepas:

*D. D. Joann. Poisson épitaphium  
Hic Piscis regina jacet, quae lilia succit  
Per nimis; an mirum si floribus occubat albis.*

At Court, she was already forgotten. Everyone seemed entirely oblivious; her death had not interrupted the regular routine in any way. The Queen, writing to the président Hénault, voices the general indifference: 'For the rest, there is

## APPENDIX A

no more mention here of *what is no more* than if she had never existed. That is the world; is it worth loving?’

The Court ladies, deceived by Louis XV’s unmoved countenance, began to make furtive plans to succeed the dead woman as official mistress. But he had not forgotten so quickly. Before the death of the marquise on April the 9th, he had written to his son-in-law the Infante Don Philippe:

‘My anxieties are not lessening at all and I confess to you that I have very little hope of a complete recovery and great fear of an end which perhaps is drawing too near. A connection of wellnigh twenty years and a sure friendship! . . .’

APPENDIX B  
A FEW DATES OF EVENTS MENTIONED  
IN THE BOOK

---

1703. Marie Leczinska born.
1710. Louis XV born. Also Madame de Mailly and La Camargo.
1713. Papal Bull *Unigenitus*.
1715. Madame de la Ferté-Imbault born.  
Sept. 1st. Louis XIV dies at Versailles.  
Oct. 24th. Law's banking system discussed.
1717. May. Peter the Great visits Versailles.
1720. Law's banking system fails.
1721. Dec. 29th. Birth of marquise de Pompadour.
1722. June 15th. Versailles reopened.
1723. Dec. 2nd. Philippe d'Orléans, the Regent, dies.
1725. Aug. 15th. King Louis XV and Marie Leczinska married by proxy at Strasbourg.  
Sept. Real wedding at Fontainebleau.
1726. Aug. Birth of twin daughters to the King and Queen.  
(Other births too numerous to give.)
1732. Louis drinks to 'the Unknown She'.
1733. (?) Aug. Secret liaison of Louis and Madame de Mailly.
1737. Madame Geoffrin opens her *salon*.
1738. July. Louis and Queen definitely separated.
1739. Madame de Vintimille, sister of the Mailly, becomes Louis' mistress.
1740. Sept. She dies after childbed.  
Nov.-Dec. Another sister, the duchesse de Châteauroux, becomes mistress.

## APPENDIX B

- 1743. Jan. Fleury dies.  
     Aug. 19th. Madame du Barry born (called Jeanne Bécu).
- 1744. May 3rd. Louis goes to Flanders.  
     Aug. 4th. Louis ill at Metz.  
     Dec. 8th. Duchesse de Châteauroux dies.
- 1745. Feb. Pompadour appears.
- 1748. May. Battle of Fontenoy.  
     Last portrait of Queen by Nattier.
- 1749. Feb. Bonnie Prince Charlie expelled from Paris.
- 1759. Feb. Comptroller-General resigns.  
     Dec. 6th. Madame Henriette dies.
- 1760. May. Action brought against Jesuits by firm of Leongi.
- 1761. Aug. 15th. *Pacte de Famille* concluded with Spain.  
     (For dates of Seven Years War, see next list.)
- 1762. Gabriel draws plans for Petit Trianon.  
     Feb. 10th. Peace of Paris.
- 1763. Ménars, Pompadour's last house near Blois, built.  
     June 20th. Peace statue unveiled in Paris.
- 1764. Pompadour dies.
- 1768. Marie Leczinska, the Queen, dies.
- 1773. July 21st. *Dominus ac Redemptor* (brief abolishing the Jesuits).
- 1774. Louis XV dies.
- 1776. Madame de Lespinasse dies.
- 1780. Madame du Deffand dies.
- 1786. Pigalle's statue of Pompadour as *L'Amitié* bought by Philippe-Egalité.
- 1789. French Revolution breaks out.
- 1793. Wednesday, Oct. 16th. Louis XV's corpse taken out of St. Denis.
- 1806. Fragonard dies.

APPENDIX C

A LIST OF DATES FOR THE LIFE OF  
THE MARQUISE

---

1721. Dec. 29th. Birth of Jeanne Antoinette Poisson.
1725. Sept. Marie Leczinska married to Louis XV.
1730. Toinette goes to Madame Le Bon, fortune-teller, who predicts that she will be Louis' mistress.
1737. Madame Geoffrin opens her *salon*.
1738. Definite separation between Louis and the Queen.
1739. Madame de Vintimille, sister of Madame de Mailly, becomes pregnant by Louis.
1740. She dies.
1741. Monsieur Poisson returns from exile. Rehabilitated after an enquiry.
- March 9th. Toinette marries Monsieur d'Étioles.
- 1742 or 1743. Her little boy is born and dies.
1744. Aug. 4th. Louis falls ill at Metz.
- Aug. 10th. Toinette's daughter Alexandrine baptized.
- Aug. Toinette very ill on learning of Louis' repentance.
- Dec. 8th. The duchesse de Châteauroux dies.
1745. Feb. 25th. Toinette goes to masked ball at Versailles.
- Feb. 28th. She goes to masked ball at Hôtel de Ville, Paris.
- April 1st. She is seen at the theatre at Versailles.
- April 22nd. She sups in the Cabinets with Louis.
- May 6th. Louis goes to Flanders.
- May 11th. Battle of Fontenoy.
- May. Toinette created marquise de Pompadour.
- Sept. 14th. She is presented at Court.

## APPENDIX C

1745. Sept. 18th. Goes to Choisy.  
 Oct. Goes to Fontainebleau.  
 Dec. Madame Poisson dies.
1746. Jan 1st. Louis gives to the Queen the tobacco box ordered for Madame Poisson.  
 May 2nd. Louis goes to Flanders again. Marquise ill.
1747. Jan. 17th. Performance of *Tartufe* in the *Appartements*.
1748. June 30th. Building of Bellevue begun.  
 Aug. Famous party at La Celle.  
 Nov. 27th. Opening of larger theatre at Versailles, on Escalier des Ambassadeurs.  
 Dec. Pompadour's brother sent to Italy.
1749. Feb. Given land for Hermitage at Versailles.  
 Feb. 11th. Famous performance of *Acis et Galatée*.  
 April 25th. Maurepas dismissed after writing famous couplet.  
 Madame de Tencin dies.
1750. Year of beginning of physical separation. Given new rooms in Versailles.  
 Madame Louise returns from Fontevault.  
 May. Blood-riots in Paris.  
 Oct. 14th. Exhibition of the King's pictures in the Luxembourg.  
 Nov. 25th. Bellevue opened.  
 Autumn. She plans the École Militaire.
1751. Year of religious jubilee.  
 Winter. Complete physical break.  
 Pavillon Français built at Trianon.  
 Nov. 2nd. Bernis sent as ambassador to Venice.  
 Dec. 19th. Monsieur de Tournhem dies.
1752. Oct. 12th. Made duchesse at Fontainebleau.
1753. March 3rd. Last performance in Bellevue theatre, in which Pompadour plays Colin in *Le Devin du Village*.



## APPENDIX C

1753. May. Morphise first mentioned. (Boucher's model and Louis' mistress.)
1754. June 15th. Alexandrine dies.  
Soon after, Monsieur Poisson dies.
1755. Sept. Starts her religious conversations with Père de Sacy.  
Sept. 22nd. Secret discussion at Babiolle about the new alliance with Austria against Prussia and England.
1756. Is nearly captured by a Paris mob.  
Jan. Finishes her talks with Père de Sacy.  
Feb. 8th. Created lady-in-waiting to the Queen.  
May. Treaty of Versailles.  
Dec. 13th. *Lit de Justice*.
1757. Sells Bellevue.  
Jan. 5th. Attempt on King's life by Damiens.  
Feb. 2nd. Bernis made minister of state.  
Sept. 10th. Convention of Closter-Severn.  
Nov. 5th. Fateful battle of Rosbach.  
Nov. Starts writing her will.
1758. Nov. 1st. Bernis exiled.  
Dec. 28th. Choiseul created *duc et pair*.
1759. She is sent the gift of a fine desk by the Empress Maria Theresa, mother of Marie-Antoinette.
1761. March 30th. She adds a codicil to her will.
1764. April 15th. Dies at Versailles.
1774. Louis XV dies.

# APPENDIX D

## DATES OF SOME CELEBRITIES MENTIONED

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### ROYALTY

The Queen	1703-1768
Louis XV	1710-1774
Frederick the Great of Prussia	1712-1786
Maria Theresa of Austria	1717-1780
Catherine the Great of Russia	1729-1796

### WRITERS OF VARIOUS KINDS

Fontenelle	1657-1757
Crébillon (Prosper)	1674-1762
Président Hénault	1685-1770
Moncrif	1687-1770
Marivaux	1688-1763
Montesquieu	1689-1755
Voltaire	1694-1778
Duclos	1704-1772
Buffon	1707-1778
Rousseau	1712-1778
Diderot	1713-1784
Bernis	1715-1794
Horace Walpole	1717-1797
Marmontel	1723-1799
Kant	1724-1804

### COMPOSERS

Lulli	1633-1687
Rameau	1683-1764

## APPENDIX D

### ARTISTS

Watteau	1684-1721
Van Loo (J. B.)	1684-1745
Nattier	1685-1766
Lancret	1690-1743
Chardin	1699-1779
Boucher	1703-1770
La Tour	1704-1788
Van Loo (C.)	1705-1765
Pigalle	1714-1785
Gabriel (the architect)	died 1782
Cochin (C. N.)	1715-1790
Fragonard	1732-1806
Moreau (the engraver)	1741-1814

### FOUNDERS OF SALONS

Madame du Deffand	1697-1780
Mademoiselle de Lespinasse	1732-1776

# INDEX

- Abel Poisson, marquis de Marigny, marquis de Vandières, brother of the Pompadour, 171, 191, 218, 252 *et seq.*  
*Adventure (An)*, 267  
 Alexandrine d'Étioles, daughter of the Pompadour, 126, 244 *et seq.*  
 Amateur theatricals, 173 *et seq.*  
 Anecdotes, 64, 165  
 Aphrodisiacs, 228  
 Aquinas (St. Thomas), 91  
 Archbishop of Rouen, 203; of Paris, 288  
 Argenson (d'), 197 *et seq.*, 291 *et seq.*  
 Art, 35, 66  
 Artists (in *salon*), 112; at Versailles, 158 *et seq.*; at Bellevue, 183, 184; in Pompadour's houses, 258; at her *toilette*, 206 *et seq.*; Pompadour friendly with, 218  
 Assumption (convent of), 246  
 Austrian Alliance, 270 *et seq.*  
 Authors (King's dislike of), 215  
 Avarice, 20, 36 *et seq.*  
 Ballet, 192  
 Barry (Madame du), 55, 202, 285  
 Bath, 205  
 Baudouin, 66, 107  
 Bellevue, 180 *et seq.*, 187, 225, 268  
 Benedict XIV, 276, 285  
 Bernis, 150 *et seq.*, 270 *et seq.*, 274, 281 *et seq.*, 290, 293  
 'Bon ton', 161, 298  
 Bouchardon, 286  
 Boucher, 57, 112, 183, 184, 218 *et seq.*, 237  
 Bourbon (abbé de), 242  
 Buffon, 207  
 Cabs, 30  
 Calvières (journal du marquis de), 45  
 Carlyle, 275  
 Carmelites, 52, 232  
 Carpaccio, 61  
 Casanova, 122  
 Cats, 45, 48, 189, 236  
 Cavalcade, 76  
 Caylus (comte de), 111  
 Chardin, 219  
 Charolais (mademoiselle de), 90 *et seq.*  
 Châteauroux (duchesse de), 97 *et seq.*, 121, 126 *et seq.*, 154, 270  
 Cherubs (and Cupids), 65, 183, 184  
 Childbirth, 239, 289  
 Childhood in the century, 34, 45 *et seq.*, 57 *et seq.*  
 Choiseul (duc de), 200 *et seq.*, 285 *et seq.*  
 Choisy (château de), 76, 94  
 Churchill (Arabella), 129  
 Cochin, 112, 114, 143, 218, 297  
 Coligny (l'amiral de), 266  
 Conti (prince de), 36, 68, 71, 271

# INDEX

Conti (princesse de), 143, 155,  
218  
Convent, 59, 246  
Corruption (in army of Louis  
XV), 279; in political life,  
285  
Crébillon (Prosper), 70, 72,  
124  
Cumberland (Duke of), 279  
  
Damien, 289 *et seq.*  
Dancing, 58  
Dante, 20  
Death, 35, 39, 42, 298  
Deffand (marquise du), 38, 41,  
42, 112, 114, 298  
Diana (disguise of Pompadour),  
143, 144  
Diderot, 107 *et seq.*, 113  
Doctors and surgeons, 44, 73,  
76, 130, 135, 197, 206, 248,  
297  
Dogs, 70, 71, 72, 106, 204  
Dress, 40, 67, 118, 119, 121  
Dwarf (*see* Midget)  
  
École Militaire, 262  
Eighteenth century (features of):  
Thieving, 39  
Characteristic face, 40, 221  
Indecency, 41, 42  
Attitude to children, 57; *see*  
*also* Childhood  
Frivolity of Convent Educa-  
tion, 61  
Fashion of receiving trades-  
people in bed, 94  
Indifference of high-born mar-  
ried people, 104  
Love becomes passion, 105  
Weddings, 106  
*Salons*, 107 *et seq.*

Motherhood, 115 *et seq.*  
Artificiality of woman, 116  
Woman, compared with other  
centuries, 117  
Country folk and hawkers,  
119, 121  
Country-house visiting, 124  
Peering into privacy of royal-  
ty, 132, 134, 136  
Attitude to Nature, 186  
*Toilette* of woman, 204 *et*  
*seq.*  
Woman's craze for study, 210  
Harmfulness of cosmetics, 227  
Letter writing of women, 249  
Hobbies of women, 263  
Women dabbling in politics,  
270  
Women callous spectators at  
torture scenes, 289  
Women and horror of death,  
298  
*See also* Art and Artists,  
Gardens, Dress, Food, Fur-  
niture  
Élysée, 258  
*Encyclopédie*, 113, 211 *et seq.*  
English, 30, 114, 119  
Engraving (art of), 263  
Estrades (comtesse d'), 154, 198  
*et seq.*  
Estrées (maréchal d'), 278  
Étioles (Monsieur d'), husband  
of Pompadour, 244  
Eustache (St.), 106, 107  
  
Favart, 297  
Fénelon, 44  
Ferté-Imbault (marquise de la),  
107 *et seq.*  
Feudal (ceremonies for receiving  
lord of manor), 250

# INDEX

- Fitz-James (Bishop of Soissons), 129, 130  
 Fleury (cardinal de), 46, 82 *et seq.*, 99, 153  
 Flowers, 118, 160, 161, 188, 259, 261  
 Fontainebleau, 74, 79  
 Fontenelle, 110, 124  
 Fontenoy, 149, 150  
 Food, 121, 164, 183  
 Fragonard, 41, 66  
 Frederick (the Great), 270 *et seq.*  
 Furniture, 65, 158 *et seq.*, 188, 190  
 Furs, 166  
  
 Gardens, 118, 171, 183, 259, 261  
 Gentry (strange ways in church), 120  
 Geoffrin (Madame), 69, 107 *et seq.*  
 Gontaut (Monsieur de), 149  
 Grand tour (of marquis de Marigny), 253  
 Greuze, 220  
 Guay (engraver), 263  
 Guérin (picture of Pompadour), 245  
  
 Hairdresser, 161  
 Hair shirt, 209  
 Hausset (Madame du), (lady's maid to Pompadour), 174, 229, 239, 241, 245, 291  
 Hénault (président de), 114  
 Horticulture, 50  
 Houses belonging to Pompadour, 258 *et seq.*  
 Hunting, 121  
  
 Innocents (cemetery of the), 137  
  
 James II, 129  
 Jesuits, 134  
  
 Kaunitz (comte de Kaunitz-Rittberg), 275 *et seq.*  
 King, *see* Louis XV  
  
*La Muette*, 90  
 La Tour (Maurice Quentin), 220 *et seq.*, 287  
 Lamballe (princesse de), 202  
 Lancret, 58, 78  
 Lavreince, 66  
 Lenotre (historian), 158, 236  
 Lespinasse (Mademoiselle de), 109  
 Letter writing, 249  
 Libels, 162, 196, 202  
 Library (of Pompadour), 264 *et seq.*  
 Lift, 154  
 Ligne (prince de), 297  
 Louis XIV (and his reign), 33, 65, 105, 120, 150, 166, 174, 242  
 Louise (duchesse de La Vallière), 20, 34, 106, 180, 202, 265  
 Louise (Madame, daughter of Louis XV), 52, 232  
 Louis XV (some features of life and character of):  
     III health and spoiling of childhood, 45  
     Beauty, 47, 122  
     Confessions, 48  
     Cruelty to animals, 48  
     Idleness, 48, 51  
     Love of teasing, 49  
     Studies, 49  
     Lack of responsibility, 50  
     Religious feelings, 51  
     Certainty that he will be saved, 51  
     *Ennui*, 64, 122  
     Looks, 75

# INDEX

- Louis XV (*cont.*):  
 Secretiveness, 87  
 Habit of keeping fasts, 87  
 Morbidity and love of macabre, 97, 163, 181  
 Physical energy, 103  
 Stinginess and other vices, 141  
 Meeting with Pompadour at Versailles ball, 142  
 Mulishness, 147  
 Private suites, 158 *et seq.*  
 A bore, 163  
 Improvement noted, 168  
 'Grand Seigneur', 168  
 Famous description of him, 169  
 Inability to laugh without pain, 181  
 Disloyalty, 199  
 Hatred of philosophers, 211  
 Dislike of Voltaire, 215  
 Disillusioned with Pompadour, 228  
 Pathological lust, 228, 233 (*see* Parc aux Cerfs)  
 Easter duties, 233  
 Callousness, 239  
 Political views vindicated, 272  
 Dislike of cardinals, 282  
 Fear of being murdered, 290  
 Confesses he never loved Pompadour, 301  
 Moved at sight of her bier, 305, 306  
 Luc (comte de), 241, 245  
 Lulli, 70  
 Machault, 198, 291 *et seq.*  
 Madeleine (curé of), 299 *et seq.*  
 Mahomet Effendi, 47  
 Mailly (Madame de), 61, 93 *et seq.*, 136, 137  
 Maintenon (Madame de), 33, 45, 120, 174, 232, 260  
*Manon Lescaut*, 265  
 Maria Theresa (Empress of Austria), 270 *et seq.*  
 Marie-Antoinette (Queen of France), 30, 84, 125, 260, 274  
 Marie-Josèphe de Saxe (second wife of Dauphin), 194  
 Marie Leczinska (Queen of France, wife of Louis XV):  
 Older than Louis, 53  
 Looks, 74  
 Poverty, 75  
 Devoutness, 77  
 Kindness, 77  
 Sense of humour and good sense, 78  
 Wedding day, 79, 80  
 Eats too many oysters, 82  
 Birth of first children, 83  
 Adherence to etiquette, 84  
 Lack of worldly wisdom, 92  
 Tired of childbearing, 92  
 Nerves, 92  
 Impeduniosity, 127  
 Kindness and lack of vindictiveness, 136, 156  
 Behaves like an old lady, 170  
 Touch of 'malice', 171  
 Good nature, 172  
 Marigny, *see* Abel Poisson  
 Marmontel, 207, 212  
 Maurepas, 99, 101, 134, 164, 195 *et seq.*  
 Meinières (président de), talks with Pompadour, 277  
 Mesdames (daughters of Louis XV), 192, 194, 201, 232, 242  
 Metz, 126  
 Meudon, 182  
 Midget, 252

# INDEX

Mignard, 175  
 Molière, 80; *see also Tartufe*  
 Montesquieu, 11  
 Moreau, 66, 115  
 Morphise (mistress of Louis XV), 219, 236 *et seq.*, 279  
 Mozart, 71  
  
 Napoleon, 263, 272  
 Nattier, 101, 112, 154, 218  
 Nigger attendant, 118  
 Ninon de Lenclos, 208  
 Notre-Dame, 128  
*Nouvelle Héloïse (La)*, 217  
 Nuns, 59 *et seq.*, 74  
  
 Oaths, 26  
 Ollivier, 71  
 Orchestra, 176  
  
*Pamela* (Richardson's), 124  
 Panniers, 41  
 Papal nuncio, 237  
 Parc aux Cerfs, 235 *et seq.*  
 Paris (people and places of):  
   Harlots, 25, 287  
   Night watchmen, 26  
   Street cries (various), 29  
   People, 85, 141  
   Bois de Boulogne, 90  
   *Bourgeoisie*, 56, 143  
   Hôtel de Ville, 145  
   Sightseeing, 187  
   Picture-hawkers, 216  
   St. Philippe du Roule, 242  
   Foolish credulity of people, 255  
   Hatred of Pompadour, 280, 298  
   Fishwives, 269  
 Parish priest, 250  
 Parliament, 276, 288  
 Parrot, 189

Patches, 68, 70, 270  
 Pitt, 286  
 Plato, 89  
 Poisson (Monsieur), father of  
   Pompadour, 25 *et seq.*, 55,  
   191, 240 *et seq.*, 249  
 Poisson (Madame), mother of  
   Pompadour, 26 *et seq.*, 55  
 Pompadour (marquise de), *née*  
   Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson,  
   then became Madame d'Éti-  
   oles; features in life and  
   character:  
   From middle classes, 56  
   Beauty, 66  
   Charm as a child, 59  
   Delicate health, 67, 104, 172,  
   191, 226, 249, 283, 290  
   Education, 70  
   Early ambitions, 73  
   Birth of daughter, 126  
   Avarice, 148  
   Lack of good breeding, 161  
   Tireless efforts to distract  
   lover, 164  
   Interest in etiquette, 166  
   Women friends, 169, 229, 233,  
   241, 292  
   Thick-skinned, 171  
   Gifts as an actress, 173 *et seq.*  
   Allowance from King, 181  
   Studied casualness about  
   riches, 185  
   Decline of health and looks,  
   187, 202, 226  
   Enemies, 193 *et seq.*  
   Fear of poison, 196  
   Friends she helped, 206  
   Dabbling in philosophy, 213  
   Occasional kindness, 213  
   Lack of literary discrimina-  
   tion, 214



# INDEX

- Physical disgust with Louis, 226, 231  
 Exhaustion, 227  
 Friendship with King, 231, 232  
 Made a duchess, 243  
 Sees Louis' mistress, 241  
 Views on beauty in women, 248  
 Loss of daughter, 248  
 Affection for father and brother, 251, 252  
 Notepaper, 251  
 Nicknames, 251  
 Disillusioned, 253 *et seq.*  
 About the Pope, 254  
 Disguises, 259  
 Hobbies, *see* Houses, Sèvres, École Militaire, Engraving, Printing, Library  
 Love of reading, 267  
 Ambition, 269  
 Love of flattery, 270  
 Knowledge of history and gift of oratory, 277  
 Hypocritical conversion, 288  
 Outwits d'Argenson, 291  
 Vindictiveness, 294  
 Last illness brought on by worry, 296  
 Last memories, 299  
 Confession, 301  
 Naked corpse, 301  
 Funeral, 305  
 Epitaph, 306  
 Forgotten, 307  
 Port-Royal, 95  
 Portail, 182  
 Post Office, 271, 293, 300  
 Powdering of wigs and hair, 209  
 Presentation at Court, 156 *et seq.*  
 Prévost (l'abbé), 166  
 Prie (marquise de), 39, 75, 83, 113  
 Printing as a hobby, 264  
 Quesnay, 206, 211, 230, 297  
 Rabelais, 38  
 Racine, 174  
 Regent (Philippe d'Orléans), 38  
 Regency, 35 *et seq.*, 113  
 Rem (Mademoiselle), 244  
 Réservoirs (hôtel des), 259  
 Rétif de la Bretonne, 295  
 Revolution (growling in distance), 180, 202, 212, 287  
 Richard (Claude), 50  
 Richelieu (maréchal de), 129, 178  
 Roch (St.), 137  
 Rohan (cardinal de), 256  
 Romans (Mademoiselle de), a mistress of Louis XV, 240 *et seq.*  
 Rosbach (battle of), 279  
 Rousseau, 57, 187, 216 *et seq.*  
 Royal wedding, 79, 80  
 Saint-Cyr, 174  
 Sainte-Beuve, 187, 246  
 Salons, 58, 59, 69  
 Satan, 19, 87  
 Saxe (Maurice de), 155, 166, 168  
 Servants, 27, 37, 68, 91, 97, 118, 119, 146, 149, 165, 181, 187, 188, 189, 195, 204 *et seq.*  
 Sévigné (marquise de), 110  
 Sèvres, 261  
 Silhouette (Monsieur de), 284 *et seq.*  
 Sledging, 85, 166  
 Smoky chimneys, 188  
 Songs in honour of Pompadour, 151 *et seq.*, 214, 215, 297  
 Soubise (prince de), 278 *et seq.*  
 Stage properties, 177

# INDEX

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>             Stahremberg, 270<br/>             Stainville (comte de), <i>see</i> Choi-<br/>                 • seul<br/>             Strasbourg, 76<br/>             Sulpice (St.), 135<br/>             Suppers, 38, 167<br/>             Swimming baths, 30<br/> <br/>             Talleyrand's cook, 183<br/> <i>Tartufe</i>, 174<br/>             Tencin (Madame de), 38, 69<br/>             Teresa (St.), 234<br/>             Thieving (administrative), 272,<br/>                 284<br/>             Tocqué, 71<br/> <i>Toilette</i>, 94, 118, 119, 204 <i>et seq.</i>,<br/>                 230 <i>et seq.</i><br/>             Tokay, 149<br/>             Torture, 289<br/>             Toulouse (comtesse de), 89 <i>et</i><br/>                 <i>seq.</i><br/>             Tournehem, 32, 54         </p> | <p>             Tournelle (Madame de la), <i>see</i><br/>                 Châteauroux<br/>             Trianon (Grand), 260, 261, 289<br/>             Tsar, 47<br/> <br/>             Versailles, 59, 81, 84, 85, 120,<br/>                 142, 154, 157 <i>et seq.</i>, 166,<br/>                 170, 259<br/>             Viaticum, 298<br/>             Villeroy, 46 <i>et seq.</i><br/> <i>Vinaigrette</i>, 259<br/>             Vintimille (Madame de), 61, 95<br/>                 <i>et seq.</i><br/>             Voltaire, 19, 54, 81, 124, 128,<br/>                 142, 150 <i>et seq.</i>, 166, 207,<br/>                 211, 214 <i>et seq.</i>, 264, 266<br/> <br/>             Walpole, 110<br/>             Watteau, 35<br/>             Wigmaker, 175<br/>             Wilkes, 111<br/>             Witchcraft, 63, 64         </p> |
|--|--|